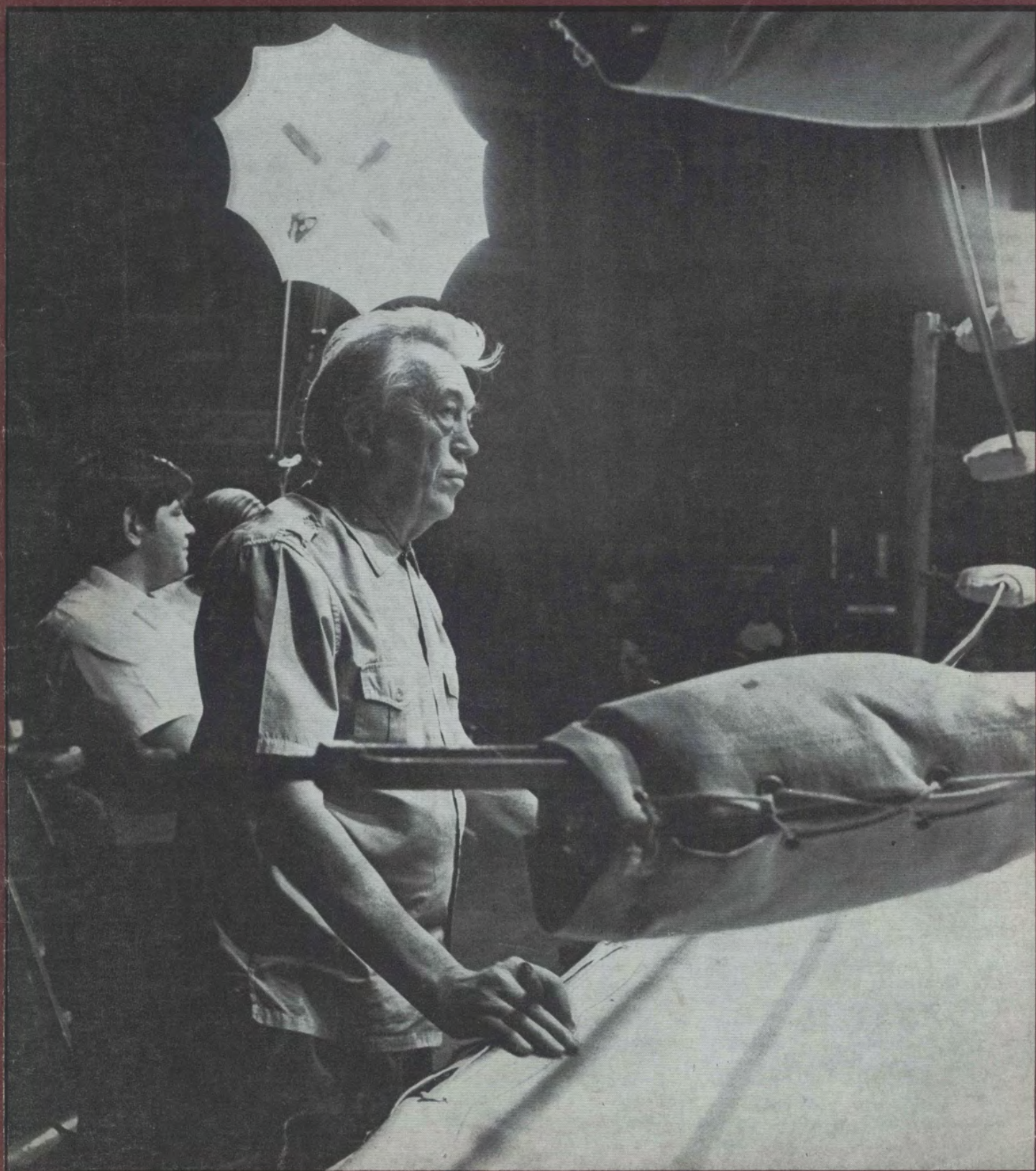


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
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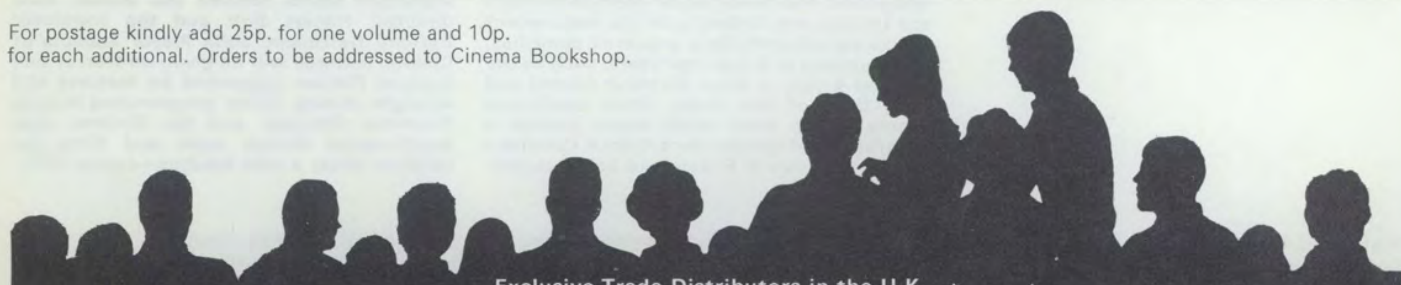
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## International Film Quarterly



Summer 1972

Volume 41 No. 3

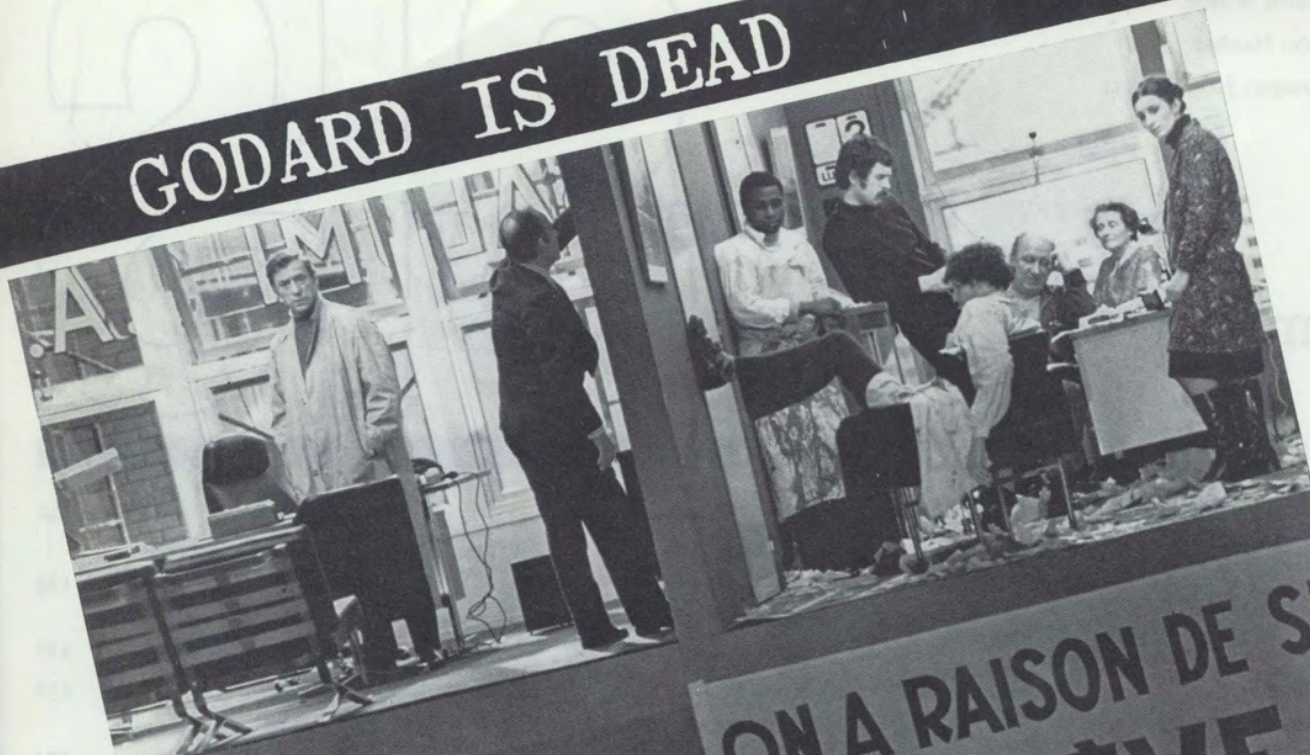
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On the cover: 'Fat City': John Huston  
at the ringside

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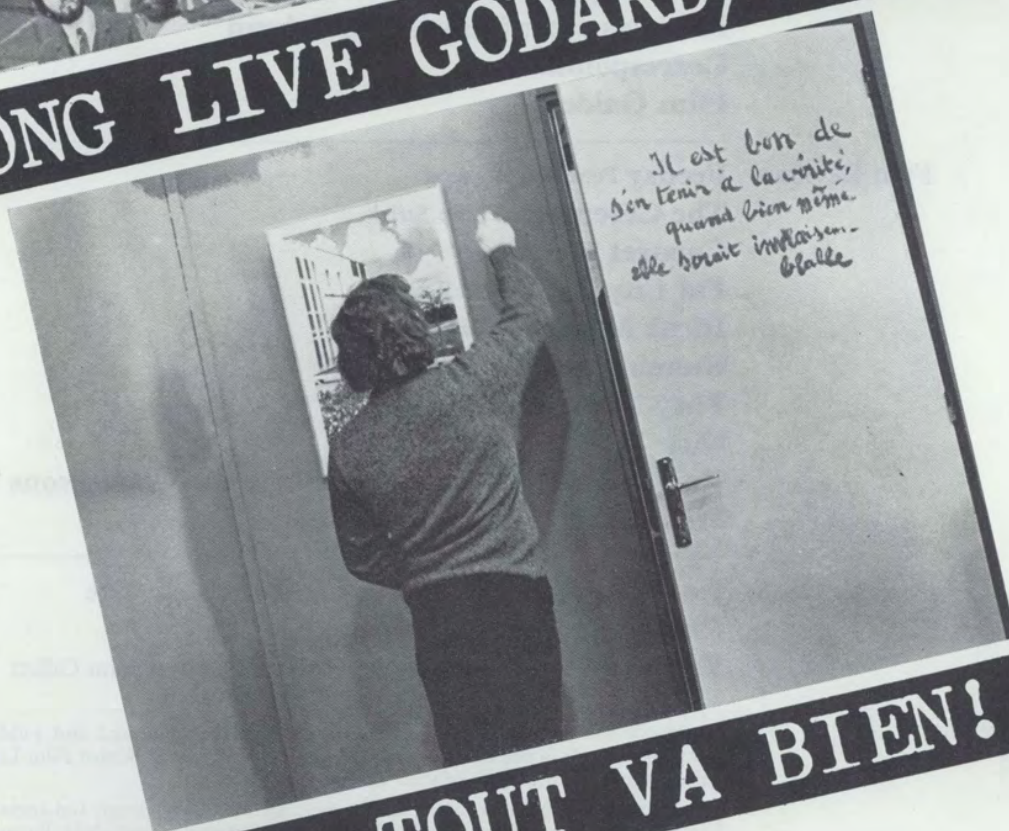
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ON A RAISON DE SE  
GRÈVE

LONG LIVE GODARD/GORIN



Il est bon de  
bien tenir à la écriture,  
quand bien même  
elle serait inutile.  
blaise

TOUT VA BIEN!

## Richard Roud

After five years' absence, Godard has come back to the Champs-Élysées. But not alone. Like *Wind from the East* and the films thereafter (none of which has been shown publicly in France), *Tout Va Bien* is co-directed by Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin. This news prompted in some a frivolously irrelevant memory of the post-war MGM slogan 'Gable's back and Garson's got him'; and in others vague premonitions that Gorin would turn out to be a Watts-Dunton to Godard's Swinburne. Not so. Whatever the specific chemistry of their partnership (and it seems that Gorin is mainly responsible for the script), this time they have succeeded magnificently.

In doing what? They themselves put it this way: 'In our opinion, this film is a serious step towards materialist fiction film-making for a large audience.' Fiction, materialist, large audience: let's see what each of these terms means.

Fiction: Jacques (Yves Montand) is a filmmaker. A scriptwriter at the time of the New Wave, he went on to direct feature films until May '68. His politics had always been Communist, but May and Prague had shaken him. Even when offered the possibility of a long-cherished project (the adaptation of a David Goodis thriller!), he decided that it would be more honest to do straight commercials than to go on making what he calls Aesthete's Cinema. His girl friend Susan (Jane Fonda) is Paris correspondent for an American radio network: we see her finishing a broadcast with a look of resigned disgust on her face, obviously fed up with having to write the kind of stuff the company wants, and well on her way to becoming, as she says, 'a correspondent who no longer corresponds to anything'.

Her next assignment is to interview a head of industry, and Jacques accompanies her to a sausage factory, only to find that the workers are on strike; the managing director has been forcibly confined to his office, and they end up getting locked in with him for five days. By the time they are let out, they have heard the boss's side of the story ('the class struggle is a 19th-century idea'), that of the trade union delegate ('we have to be very careful'), and the view of those strikers whom the union man calls Leftists ('we're all on an assembly line'). The rest of the film is concerned with the effect of their experience on their personal relationship.

We see Jacques at work on a commercial for Dim tights, and, in a very long to-camera monologue, he makes his position clear. This is followed by Susan throwing up her job when her piece on the strike is rejected. Their problems come to a head at breakfast when Susan tries to make Jacques realise that dinner/movies/sex are not enough, that unless their relationship expands, unless it takes into account the political and social problems of their times, it will founder in its own isolation and triviality.

The last part of the film is called 'Today'. Jacques realises that 1968 was not the end of something, but only a beginning, and that he must rethink his position historically. Susan does a reportage on a supermarket symbolically enough called 'Crossroads', during which she realises that the problems of the factory are not confined to it alone, that all of contemporary life is a kind of factory, and that one must begin anywhere and everywhere to fight for change. The film ends with the two lovers meeting at a café. First, we see him inside, waiting; finally,

she arrives, knocks on the window, and comes in. But we cannot hear what they say. Then the scene is repeated, reversed: she is inside, waiting, and he appears at the window. Most films, the narrator tells us, end with a couple coming out of a crisis, but we are often left wondering whether they are not about to go into another one. This film ends with the couple together, but mute. We can imagine each of them saying, in turn, 'I was afraid you wouldn't come,' and the other replying, 'You were right to be afraid.' And the film closes with an untranslatable pun: '*Un conte pour ceux qui n'en tiennent aucun*'—a tale for those who don't take things into account.

Materialist: Both Godard and Gorin think it indispensable that their audience should realise they are in fact watching a film. So the first image we see is the focus-pattern, the film equivalent of the TV test pattern, and the first sound is of a clapper-board. The credits are punctuated with the clacking sound of the clapper-board (the effect is strangely Japanese).

All this has become fashionable in recent years; Godard/Gorin go further. The film proper is preceded by a dialogue between a man and a woman. He: 'I want to make a film.' She: 'You need money to make movies.' Whereupon the screen is filled with a cheque book: one after the other, cheques for the sound men, cameramen, sets, costumes, etc. are signed, and the cheques ripped out with a noise not unlike that of the clapper-board.

But, the girl goes on, to get the money you need international stars. O.K., he says, we'll get them—and two more cheques are signed. So much for the economic reality of the production. Ah, but Yves Montand and Jane Fonda won't do a film unless it has a story, and it had better be a love story. Right, he replies, and we are treated to a two-minute idyll by a river bank. 'I love your forehead, your mouth, your shoulders, your breasts, your legs,' says Montand. 'Ah,' replies Fonda, 'then you love me totally?'

That's no good—they're just a couple of zombies. You've got to situate them in a time and place. O.K., he replies, and the prologue finishes up with our couple being set up in France, with the 'workers who work, the peasants who peasant, the bourgeois who bourgeois.' Throughout the film Godard/Gorin have been careful to remind us that we are watching a movie: during the monologues given to Jacques, Susan, the union man, etc., they all seem to be replying to an unseen and unheard interviewer. At other

moments, the characters suddenly step out of situation to stare at us, reminding us of the camera and of the men behind it.

The monologues themselves are materialist in that they have largely not been invented. The text of the union delegate comes from *La Vie Ouvrière*, that of the factory manager from a book called *Long Live the Consumer Society*. Montand's monologue is a provocative synthesis of elements both from his own life (his long-standing support of the French Communist Party) and from that of Godard. It is no accident that both of the film's 'international stars' are well known to be politically oriented.

The way Godard/Gorin have handled the problem of the workers could also be called materialist. They decided not to use real workers since, given the current situation, a worker could only do an imitation of Gabin imitating a worker. So they chose to use actors, but actors who have not had much success, actors for whom the role of the exploited is one they have suffered in their own professional lives.

Finally, for almost the first time, Godard has used a set. The whole office wing of the sausage factory is a huge two-storey decor, with a glass fourth wall, a cross-section stage set over which his camera ceaselessly travels. The Brechtian point is to keep the spectator from identifying, to keep him thinking. Curiously enough the (presumably) real supermarket looks just as phoney, perhaps because the sequence is shot in the same way, with endless right and left tracking shots.

A film for a large audience: Gorin admits that the possible public for *Un Film comme les Autres* was of the order of five, and even *Wind from the East* couldn't hope to reach more than two thousand people. This time, they tried for a larger audience, and they will get it. Not just because of the stars; although Godard, even when most documentary in style, has always been at his best with actors, and once again the miracle of incarnation has taken place. In his recent films, the message was too often simply laid on the line for the faithful to receive. Here, the Fonda and Montand characters serve as referents for the audience, and the interaction of the film's events (the strike, etc.) on the 'private' lives of this bourgeois couple is important not only in itself, but as a crutch for... the bourgeois audience. In any case, they're certainly a lot easier to listen to than the chattering tape-recorders or the long readings of texts which have been such an obtrusive feature of Godard's post-68 films. The other actors have been no less carefully chosen: Vittorio Caprioli's Ubu-esque captain of industry, Jean Pignol's CGT delegate, and almost all of the workers, are superb.

Most important, however, is that Godard no longer feels the need to deny himself as artist or intellectual. For years, he had adopted Eve Democracy's axiom in *One Plus One* that the only way for an intellectual to become a revolutionary was to stop being an intellectual. Now, he has come to the realisation that one can, and one must, be both intellectual and revolutionary. 'Whoever says new content, must also say new forms; and who says new forms must also say new relationships between content and form.'

Accordingly, the greatest difference between *Tout Va Bien* and its immediate predecessors is in the way it looks and sounds. The film has been very simply made: almost all the shots are straight-on, eye-level, but Godard's genius for camera movement, for the staggering image, and his unique sense of sound and editing, are once again very much in evidence. Take Jane Fonda's long monologue: she actually speaks it in English, but after a few sentences, we suddenly hear her own voice doing it in French over her English voice, and the way the French gets ahead of the English, then falls back, then coincides, the way that the two languages appear and disappear from

the soundtrack, is a sound-editing job more complex and more abstractly (concretely?) fascinating than any he has previously achieved.

The tracking shots in the supermarket, taken from just behind the endless rows of cash registers, sweep implacably across the enormous space at a clip which takes your breath away. The whole sequence is shot from this one vantage line, so the action (the irruption of a band of Leftists led by . . . Anne Wiazemsky) all takes place in the corridors perpendicular to the screen, giving the scene a surreal sense of space and time which makes of the supermarket the symbol Godard/Gorin intended.

During the sit-down strike, one of the workers appears with a paint-roller and begins to paint a wall blue. Carefully he rolls it on, and at first the wall looks like an abstract painting in the Soulages manner. Then, just as carefully, he starts to cover over a black-and-white photograph on the wall, slowly and neatly obliterating it into that all-involving blue: the effect is as stunning to experience as it is difficult to explain. Cultural revolution? In any case, one of those magical effects which go beyond mere understanding.

If the old Godard is dead, then long live Godard/Gorin. *Tout*, one is relieved to proclaim, *va bien*. ■

# THEORY AND PRACTICE

## The criticism of JEAN-LUC GODARD

Jonathan Rosenbaum

Godard's collected criticism<sup>1</sup> is many things at once: informal history (1950-1967) of the arts in general and film in particular, spiritual and intellectual autobiography, a theory of aesthetics, a grab bag of puns. For those who read the pieces when they first appeared—chiefly in the yellow-covered *Cahiers du Cinéma* and the newspaper format of *Arts*—it was frequently ill-mannered gibberish that began to be vindicated (or amplified) when the films followed, retrospectively becoming a form of prophecy:

'... each shot of *Man of the West* gives one the impression that Anthony Mann is reinventing the Western, exactly as Matisse's portraits reinvent the features of Piero della Francesca . . . in other words, he both shows and demonstrates, innovates and copies, criticises and creates.'

For those who encounter the films first, it is likely to seem like an anthology of footnotes serving to decipher and augment what may have once seemed like ill-mannered gibberish on the screen. But for those more interested in continuity than cause and effect, it rounds out a seventeen-year body of work—from an article on Joseph Mankiewicz in *Gazette du Cinéma* to the 'Fin du Cinéma' title concluding *Weekend*—that has already transformed much of the vocabulary and syntax of modern narrative film, further illustrating a style that has passed from avant-garde to neo-classical in less than a decade. And as a fringe benefit, for those interested in Getting Ahead in the Commercial Avant-Garde, it is probably the best casual guide-book since Francis Steegmuller's recent biography of Cocteau.

Like Cocteau, Godard commands a vigorous rhetoric that crosses nimbly from one medium to another, registers most effectively in aphorisms, playfully orbits the work of other artists into a toy-like cosmology

of its own, and instantly changes whatever it touches by assimilating it into a personal aesthetic. Look long enough at his criticism and virtually every departure in Godard's films will be theoretically justified; study the films with enough scrutiny, and even the most outrageous reviews will start to make sense.

Generally less pugnacious than Truffaut, less logical than Rivette, and less Catholic than either Chabrol or Rohmer, Godard tops all four as a critic on the few occasions when he works at full steam. In 'Defence and Illustration of Classical Construction' (a brilliant riposte to Bazin's anti-montage theories), 'Take Your Own Tours' (a mosaic of travelogue, festival reporting and aesthetics), and reviews of *The Wrong Man*, *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* and *Man of the West*, he displays a rigour, imagination and feeling for nuance that few other critics of the period have equalled. In the least interesting pieces—mainly volleys of dull spite against films that usually don't warrant the effort—he becomes a semi-anonymous

'*Tout Va Bien*': Yves Montand, Jane Fonda



journalist typing out his obligatory notice. Some articles, such as the one on Mizoguchi, seem to be paste-ups of remembered conversations with colleagues; others are unabashed advertisements for the films of friends; while a few (notably reviews of *Bitter Victory* and *Montparnasse 19*) forsake critical decorum altogether, take off into the clouds, and deliver impassioned dithyrambs to the gods who inspired the ascent—moving and daring declarations even when one is less than clear about the precise meanings:

'*Montparnasse 19* is a film of fear. In this sense, it might be subtitled "the mystery of the film-maker". For in unwittingly investing Modigliani's unbalanced mind with his own perturbation, Jacques Becker—clumsily, admittedly, but infinitely movingly—allows us to penetrate the secret of artistic creation more effectively than Clouzot did by filming Picasso at work. After all, if a modern novel is fear of the blank page, a modern painting fear of the empty canvas, and modern sculpture fear of the stone, a modern film has the right to be fear of the camera, fear of the actors, fear of the dialogue, fear of the montage. I would give the whole of post-war French cinema for that one shot, badly acted, badly composed, but sublime, in which Modigliani asks five francs for his drawings on the terrace of the Coupole.

'Then, but only then, everything pleases in this displeasing film. Everything rings true in this totally false film. Everything is illuminated in this obscure film. For he who leaps into the void owes no explanations to those who watch.'

The spirited, nonstop babble of this voice, heard the same year (1958) dubbing Jean-Paul Belmondo in *Charlotte et son Jules*, is a guttural, rasping monotone that somehow manages to traverse enormous distances quickly; using epigrams as stepping stones, it proceeds by leaps and bounds across vast reaches of contemporary culture. Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of this style is impatience. Consider Truffaut's memories of Godard around 1950:

'What struck me most . . . at the time was the way he absorbed books. If he were at a friend's house, during one evening he would open easily forty books, and he always read the first and last pages.

'... He liked cinema as well as any of us, but he was capable of going to see fifteen minutes each of five different films in the same afternoon.'

This frenzied rush—a race with destiny,



'Tout Va Bien'

like Belmondo's attempted flight at the end of *Breathless*—appears to be the impetus behind most of the achievements, from the jump cuts of the early films to the extended, autonomous takes of the later ones. At the point of self-parody, it is 'Bouvard and Pecuchet' in a café in 2 or 3 *Things I Know About Her*, speedily reciting and copying down random passages from a mountain of books. In Godard's prose as much as in his films, this sense of urgency creates a form of criticism in the present tense, an endeavour that no other recent critic—with the possible exception of Manny Farber—has even approximated. It is essential to this method that everything remains *in process*: ideas are introduced in order to spawn other ideas rather than flesh out careful exegeses, and movement invariably takes precedence over explanation: 'There was theatre (Griffith), poetry (Murnau), painting (Rossellini), dance (Eisenstein), music (Renoir). Henceforth there is cinema. And the cinema is Nicholas Ray.' In a footnote to the first sentence, Godard spends three paragraphs trying to explain away all his paradoxes; but each argument becomes still another leap into the void.

The continuities between Godard's reviews and other films he has seen, and still others which he will eventually make, create a dense network. *Derrière le Miroir*, the French title of Ray's *Bigger than Life*, crops up frequently as an image in reviews that presumably have nothing to do with Ray.

A line delivered by Mai-Britt Nilsson in Bergman's *Sommorlek*—about not being able to close her eyes as tightly as she wants to—fails to appear in Godard's tribute to the film in 'Bergmanorama', but surfaces nine months later in his review of *A Time to Love and a Time to Die*, where he uses it to define the theme of Sirk's film ('blackness') without mentioning either Bergman or the film's title; shortly thereafter, Jean Seberg delivers the line in *Breathless*. Four years later, Sirk's film in its turn becomes an important source for *Les Carabiniers*—particularly the shooting of a partisan woman who denounces her assassins (a Russian peasant in Sirk's film, a French girl quoting Mayakovsky in Godard's). Another variation of the scene appears at the indoor swimming pool in *Alphaville* . . . but why go on? Undoubtedly hundreds of such threads could be traced through Godard's labyrinth.

By his own admission, Godard's films are also criticism, and it is worth considering how—and how effectively—they fulfil this function. Blake's 'Imitation is criticism' is not quite enough; indeed, Eliot's 'Between the emotion / And the response / Falls the Shadow' probably comes closer to explaining Godard's distance from his models. *Breathless* works intermittently as a thriller, but self-consciousness about the genre tends to veer it in another direction; *Bande à Part*—like Monicelli's *Big Deal on Madonna Street*

—mainly comments on other 'big heist' films by failing to match them. Just as Faulkner, by his own account, developed his prose style out of an inability to write lyric poetry, Godard's modernism—at least until *Pierrot le Fou*—largely stems from his inability to make pure 'classic' or genre films. (After that, one would probably have to substitute 'refusal' for 'inability'.) And it is in the shadow between emotion and response, model and imitation, that his criticism must be located.

In *Alphaville*, this shadow is blackness—specifically, the blackness of the German expressionist cinema (*Caligari* and *Lulu*, *Mabuse* and *Metropolis*, *The Golem* and *Faust*) and the cinema that derives from it (*Scarface* and *Kiss Me Deadly*; *Orphée* and *The Trial*). Perhaps the two latter films, in addition to furnishing the Orpheus myth and Akim Tamiroff, also suggested the use of real locations instead of sets. But by relating this use to science-fiction (which itself has important links with German expressionism), Godard criticises the conventions of the genre—and subsequently alters its possibilities, to judge from offspring like *THX 1138*. More profoundly, he comments on the implicit thematic values of light and darkness in German expressionism by making them explicit, even self-conscious, in the film's symbology. 'Light that goes . . . light that returns,' chants Natasha in the film's central love scene, as the light modulates back and forth from blinding intensity

to darkness—as it does throughout much of the film, usually at a faster, blinking tempo. 'From needing to know, I watched the night create the day . . . ?' 'What transforms the night into day?' Alpha-60 asks Lemmy, who replies: 'Poetry'. Even the abrupt shifts to negative express the same dialectic.<sup>2</sup> Quite aside from the specific homages (figures clinging to the wall like Cesare sleepwalking in *Caligari*, a track through the hotel's revolving door from *The Last Laugh*, Professor Nosferatu, etc.), *Alphaville* has more to say about the silent German cinema than any of the passing references in Godard's essays. Criticism composed in the language of the medium, it brings social and aesthetic insight equally into focus, and certainly deserves a place next to Kracauer and Eisner.

The relative cohesiveness of *Alphaville*'s imagery gives it a steadier critical reference than most of Godard's other films: perhaps only *Les Carabiniers*, his critique of the war film, sticks as closely to its subject. More frequently, he comments on genres by mixing them, or playing one off against the other. *Pierrot le Fou* is largely a colourful fruit salad of Hollywood forms—crime thriller, comedy, chase film, musical, adventure. In *Une Femme est une Femme*, neo-realism can't do justice to the dreams of Angéla, and musical comedy would gloss over the drabness of her days, so Godard attempts a 'neo-realist musical' to paint her life. Unfortunately, the drabness is itself pretty banal, the comedy laborious, and Michel Legrand's musical score—neither synchronised nor asynchronised with the action in a convincing manner—consistently unmemorable. The net result is fairly constant clumsiness, in nearly every department, and in order to justify this film—as criticism or art—one would ultimately have to evoke Godard's review of *Montparnasse 19* as a support (as Jean-André Fieschi once did in *Cahiers*).

In *Made in U.S.A.*, however—one of the most maligned films in Godard's pre-1968 canon, and undeservedly so—the cross-breeding of the violent action thriller with the animated cartoon yields much more interesting results. Confronting a web of impenetrable, anxiety-producing mysteries (the Kennedy assassination, the Ben Barka affair, etc.), Godard chooses—much like Rivette in *Paris Nous Appartient*—to evoke their terrors by making his intrigue as ambiguous and complex as possible. Turning to seemingly incompatible Hollywood genres for illustration, he begins to suggest what the two have in common: tendencies towards sadism and hysteria, idealisation of types with occasional right-wing implications; the wish-fulfilment and fantasy of the crime thriller, the primal violence and terror of the cartoon. (To exemplify these strains in two recent releases, consider Disney's *Song of the South* and Siegel's *Dirty Harry*.) The aggressive anti-logic of various elements in the dialogue and plot help to abstract these genres, for Godard's purposes, into simplified, almost schematic formal diagrams: lots of red paint and brutal noises, rapid transitions and dream-like ellipses. This pungent blend of sensual and compositional 'essences' recaptures some of the spirit of both genres while revealing their formal and political meeting-points. Numerous annotations are offered on the subject: 'a film by Walt

Disney, but played by Humphrey Bogart,' 'Walt Disney plus blood'; a dedication of the film to Nick (Ray) and Samuel (Fuller) in bold primary colours; characters named David Goodis, Inspector Aldrich, Mark Dixon, Dr. Korvo<sup>3</sup> and Widmark, the last of whom (Laszlo Szabo) imitates Tweety Pie; a black car parked in front of a Disney display. Unlike *Alphaville*, this cannot be called criticism in depth; but it is provocative commentary nonetheless.

Although *Weekend*, the last of Godard's features to be completed before May 1968, probably contains more filmic allusion per square foot than any that preceded it, the direction of his criticism from *Masculine-Feminine* (1966) increasingly turns from cinematic to social and political subjects. Not that an interest wasn't already there: his second published essay, dated 1950, is entitled 'Towards a Political Cinema'. But judging from his subsequent prose, it probably isn't until 'Take Your Own Tours' nine years later that the world outside the cinema begins to become more important than the movies inside. And even in *Le Petit Soldat*, an attempt to confront the Algerian war, Godard's sources are politics in literature and cinema rather than in the street. The tempo, duration and dry, objective treatment of Bruno's extended torture and suicide attempt seem partially derived from Dashiell Hammett's *The Glass Key* (which already supplied *Breathless* with a wisecrack about wearing silk and tweeds together). Moreover, the existential decision of Hammett's hero to submit to brutality rather than betray his friend, a corrupt politician—essentially resolving to stick by one crook instead of another—closely parallels the moral arbitrariness of Bruno's choice of Right over Left, which leads to his own torture at the hands of the FLN. Within each scale of values, taking a position and remaining steadfast seems more of an issue than the actual position taken.

According to Jean Collet, in his book *Jean-Luc Godard*, Godard's 'point of departure' for *Le Petit Soldat* was the character of O'Hara in *The Lady from Shanghai*. Bruno's final words in the film do have a somewhat familiar ring: 'Only one thing was left to me: learn not to be bitter. But I was happy, because I had a lot of time in front of me.' And the following comparison of dialogue from *Johnny Guitar* and *Le Petit Soldat* speaks for itself, further suggesting that the doomed romanticism of Hammett, Welles and Ray appealed more to Godard at the time than the social and political questions they dealt with:

JOHNNY (Sterling Hayden): Lie to me, tell me that all these years you've waited for me, tell me.

VIENNA (Joan Crawford): All these years I've waited for you.

JOHNNY: If I hadn't returned, you would have died.

VIENNA: If you hadn't returned, I would have died.

BRUNO (Michel Subor): Lie to me . . . Say you aren't sad that I'm leaving.

VÉRONICA (Anna Karina): I'm not sad that you're leaving. I'm not in love with you. I won't join you in Brazil. I don't kiss you tenderly.

When Godard cast Jean Seberg as a journalist in *Breathless*, this may have been

prompted by his own immediate past, which had at least as much to do with journalism as with criticism. When he recast her as a television reporter in *Le Grand Escroc*, changing her name from Franchini to Leacock, he was resuming a line of inquiry that continues, unabated, into the present: the heroine of *Tout Va Bien*, Susan DeWitt (Jane Fonda), is also an American journalist, holding a somewhat implausible job as a radio correspondent. But the climax of his concern with reporting and documentary comes in 2 or 3 *Things I Know About Her*, surely the most ambitious of all his attempts to create a new language of truth-telling. Just as, in all of the previous films, the spirit of documentary brushes against his fictions—criticising, testing and impinging on them—so his criticism of documentary in 2 or 3 *Things* makes liberal use of the techniques of fiction. Similar in this respect to both Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* and Mailer's *Armies of the Night*, it is a meditation composed of reflections on a shifting subject (Paris, Juliette, prostitution, suburban housing) and continual questions about how to reflect on this subject—a see-sawing operation that undermines the nature of 'content' as well as 'style'. Are the enormous close-ups of coffee filling the screen an exposition of the real, or—coupled with Godard's poetic narration—an expression of the infinite? Is the remarkable montage sequence at the garage an analysis of an event, or the construction of one? The probing voice and camera question everything, refusing to stay within a single viewpoint or method, thereby challenging *cinéma-vérité* (and cinema itself) at its very sources, reaching out for something else.<sup>4</sup>

## Notes

1. *Godard on Godard*. Translation and commentary by Tom Milne. (Secker and Warburg, £3.50.) Milne's translation is a careful—and for the most part, successful—attempt to render Godard legibly, and his commentaries, spread out over nearly forty pages, are rich with information and opinions about minor French directors, multiple cross-references between articles and films, and wide-ranging gossip (e.g. the snack bars Godard frequented in 1959). One regrets, however, the omission of nearly all of the reviews' original titles, a somewhat cumbersome and incomplete index, and the loss of several of Godard's best puns, which perhaps only G. Cabrera Infante of *Three Trapped Tigers* could do adequate justice to. A final quibble, which relates equally to the French edition: since this collection is so close to being complete, why were a few stray pieces (like 'Trois mille heures de cinéma' in *Cahiers du Cinéma* 184) left out?

2. By a stroke of unusual good fortune, the American dubbed version of *Alphaville* improves on the original in one scene: as fluorescent lights flicker on in a dark corridor, the remark of the guide leading Lemmy, in place of 'Le jour se lève', is 'Sunrise'.

3. As Tom Milne informs us in *Godard on Godard*, Dixon and Korvo are characters in two thrillers directed by Otto Preminger—*Where the Sidewalk Ends* and *Whirlpool*, respectively. Still other references are made in the dialogue to 'rue Preminger' and 'rue Ben Hecht'. The surname of Donald (Jean-Pierre Léaud) is never given, but one is tempted to assume it to be either 'Duck' or 'Siegel'.

4. The gradual clarification and articulation of this 'something else'—Godard's increased political mobilisation after May 1968, and his collaboration with Jean-Pierre Gorin—fall beyond the scope of this study. It is worth noting, however, that in *Vent d'Est* one finds a Marxist critique of the Western, while *Tout Va Bien* offers explicit auto-critiques of *Le Mépris* and other earlier works.

# VENCEREMOS!



## Aspects of Latin American Political Cinema

David Wilson

It is a truism that all cinema is political. Despite some backwaters of critical irreverence which would have it otherwise, every film ultimately reflects political views either for or against the ideological system within which it is made. In the Western capitalist countries (and arguably in the state capitalist countries of Eastern Europe) it has largely been a question of degree; the extent to which a film has been political, whether it be *Salt of the Earth* or *The Green Berets* or Doris Day, has mattered little in the context of a conservative, or at best a liberal-conservative, ideological consensus.

There may have been exceptions, or at least half-exceptions (and perhaps films like *Kuhle Wampe* or *Spanish Earth* could rank as such), but even within the realist or socialist realist framework of most overtly political cinema it has, until fairly recently, been exceptionally difficult to point to a film which openly and intentionally advocated the overthrow of the system in which it was

produced and which produced it. Indeed, one has to look beyond the realist perspective, to the cinema of the anarchists and the surrealists, to find films which have come anywhere near to upsetting the safely loaded political applecart. Elsewhere, it has been a case of pleas for reform, humanist protest, yes; revolution, absolutely no. You can rearrange the apples, but you can't tip the cart. The cinema has been a dream-machine for the solitary in the dark; hence the individualist ethic of films like *Mr. Smith Goes*



Above: 'Mexico, the Frozen Revolution'  
Left: 'Blood of the Condor'

to Washington or On the Waterfront, or on another front the cosy paternalism of *Earth* or *Lenin in October*. Peasants in the Urals and clerks in New York have shuffled out into the light with a warm glow in their hearts, satisfied for the moment that there can't be much wrong with the world when you can fix a tractor by urinating into the radiator, or call on a country scoutmaster to filibuster for the rights of the little man. As for so-called political cinema, in the sense that they have survived precisely by feeding the illusions of a traditionalist, negatively indoctrinated public, non-political 'entertainment' films have had immeasurably greater political impact.

This is a sweeping statement, and I hope to substantiate it in a subsequent article. Meanwhile, this preamble has served to clear the way for a look at one area of cinema which in the last few years has provided its own kind of answer to the limitations, contradictions and self-delusions of what has passed for political cinema. Militant Latin American film-makers have decisively rejected traditional notions of political cinema, which they see at best as reformist (documenting the effects of poverty, oppression or whatever, without analysing the causes of those effects) and at worst as a mere shoring up of the foundations of mass illusion. Thanks to a representative season of Latin American political films at the National Film Theatre, organised through the enterprise of the Other Cinema in London and the Third World Cinema Group in New York, it is possible to see these films not as isolated propaganda showcases but in the perspective of a radical re-evaluation of political cinema.

What emerges, and with force, is that film-makers like Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in Argentina, Jorge Sanjines in Bolivia, and Miguel Littin in Chile have taken up Godard's dictum about making films politically and are actively applying it. To these film-makers, film is not a creative offering hidebound by cultural and commercial restrictions; film is an *act*, and the spectator is no longer a passive, mute receiver but an active participant in a continuing and open-ended political dialogue. While Godard conducts this dialogue with himself and a privileged minority audience (which may be a useful preliminary exercise), the Latin American film-makers have taken film to the people. And if that sounds glib, Sanjines' *Blood of the Condor* has already been seen by more Bolivians than any other film shown in that country.

The basis for this revolution has already been commented on by Solanas and Getino, its two most lucid theoreticians and makers of *La Hora de los Hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*), four hours and twenty minutes of 'film act' and the key film in this new departure for political cinema. Solanas and Getino describe their aim as the 'decolonisation of culture'. Rejecting the values of a society in which 'man is accepted only as a passive and consuming object', and discarding as irrelevant to the Latin American political situation a reformist, anti-Establishment cinema which is quickly absorbed by the ruling Establishment as one more item of consumer goods, a cinema in which 'Vietnam can be mentioned, but only far from Vietnam', they advocate—and have produced—a cinema in which the film-maker

is no longer the subjective artist serving up his talents, and his interpretations, to the people, but merely the agent through which the camera lens records and analyses the objective reality of a political situation in which the audience is actively involved; which in some Latin American countries includes the very act of seeing such a film, as witness the clandestine screenings of several films and the official harassment of those participating in this film dialogue.

The process of decolonising a culture involves first a demystification of bourgeois cultural values, because, 'Imperialism and capitalism, whether in the consumer society or in the neocolonialised country, veil everything behind a screen of images and appearances. The image of reality is more important than reality itself. It is a world peopled with fantasies and phantoms in which what is hideous is clothed in beauty, while beauty is disguised as the hideous.' (A conclusion shared, of course, by revolutionary left theorists from Marx to Fanon, whose aphorism 'Every spectator is a coward or a traitor' Solanas and Getino take as one of their texts for *La Hora de los Hornos*.) In its place is proposed a cinema of revolution which is 'at the same time one of destruction and construction: destruction of the image that neocolonialism has created of itself and of us, and construction of a throbbing, living reality which recaptures truth in any of its expressions.' It is not a cinema which simply documents and records, though that may be an important element in it, but a cinema which 'attempts to intervene in the situation ... provides discovery through transformation.' In practice, this means cinema organised by revolutionary cadres, by guerrilla units, by factory workers, by peasant communities. The camera, for these film-makers, is 'the inexhaustible expropriator of image-weapons', the projector 'a gun that can shoot 24 frames per second.'

Fine-sounding theory; but in Latin America the theory has already been put into practice. Despite official bans and widespread reprisals, films like *La Hora de los Hornos* are distributed clandestinely on 16 mm. and even 8 mm., and shown in factories, universities, church halls, private apartments—and in Montevideo to packed houses in the city's largest cinema. The result has been that each showing has provoked what Solanas and Getino call 'a liberated space, a decolonised territory ... We thus discovered a new facet of cinema: the *participation* of people who, until then, were considered spectators.' And 'what appeared yesterday as a preposterous adventure is posed today as an inescapable need and possibility.'

Although it is necessary to understand the theory which determines these film acts, I don't want to debate the theoretical issues raised by Latin American revolutionary cinema, and especially by *La Hora de los Hornos* as the paradigm of an entirely new approach to didactic film. As Solanas and Getino have said, 'Our time is one of hypothesis rather than of thesis, a time of works in progress—unfinished, unordered, violent works made with the camera in one hand and a rock in the other.' Moreover, since the film act involves an open-ended film, it is not for the critic, in the first in-

stance, to evaluate a dialogue in the absence of its protagonists, the film audience. (And I am well aware of the danger, implied by Solanas and Getino, of defusing the film detonator of Latin American militant cinema by enshrining it in consumer products like this magazine.)

The dialogue continues, and there are conflicts of opinion among the film-makers themselves. The Bolivian Jorge Sanjines, for instance, talks about creating 'a consciousness for liberation'; which, in the sense that consciousness is an obvious prerequisite for action, corresponds with the ideas of Solanas and Getino, but which in another sense modifies what they say. More importantly, the current political situation varies from one Latin American country to another (Brazil and Bolivia are labouring under military governments, Chile has a democratically elected Marxist president, and so on), and as ever politics in Latin America are in a constant state of flux. There are no categorical imperatives for revolutionary cinema; and just as Fanon wrongly posited Algeria as the model for revolution throughout Africa, so it would be wrong to suggest, or comment on, some supposedly universal theory for militant film-making in Latin America—a point which has not, alas, been taken by some of the more unthinking enthusiasts for this cinema both in London and New York. I want instead to examine some of the themes raised in recent Latin American political films, and to point up divergences as well as similarities. A film like *Blood of the Condor*, while having an obvious common ground with, say, *La Hora de los Hornos*, is radically different from that film in style, attitude and immediate if not basic intention.

The first and most immediate common theme running through these films is an uncompromising affirmation of a national identity, which is linked to, indeed inseparable from, the secondary themes of underdevelopment and neocolonialism. Fanon was the most cogent spokesman on the need for colonised peoples to assimilate and activate a consciousness of their own national cultural values as a necessary condition of shaking off their colonial bonds. The Algerian woman had first to recognise the veil for what it was, then decide whether or not to remove it, rather than simply accede to French colonial 'civilising' persuasion. Latin American film-makers acknowledge their debt to Fanon by giving voice to his call for an unadulterated national consciousness. Self-awareness, however, requires self-knowledge. So, many of these films bristle with information—political history, economic statistics, the facts and figures as well as the causes and consequences of underdevelopment and its concomitant dependence. The first part of *La Hora de los Hornos*, for instance, is made up of a series of film documents, thirteen notes and a prologue on the reality of the Argentinian situation.

Solanas and Getino mobilise all the options of the documentary film-maker—newsreels, stills, montage, commentary, commercials, clips from other films, juxtaposition of official fantasy and unofficial fact, opposition of sound and image—and weld them into a dynamic and radically original exposition of a present reality which sweeps away the mists of organised ignorance and

the secondhand cosmopolitan fantasies of a European and *mestizo* minority. Their purpose is informational, and beyond that an attempt to define neocolonialism and the systematic eradication of national identity by the neocolonialist power structure. A mere 6% of arable land is under cultivation, the living conditions of 90% of the rural population have barely changed since pre-Columbian days, infant mortality in rural areas is 40%, and so on. To borrow a phrase, this is a report to the people; and later in the film, the audience is invited to debate that report, and to add testimony of their own. The film breaks off for discussion, pamphlets are distributed during the screening, the spectator cannot help being involved in a two-way communication process. This film act thus becomes, in Fanon's words, 'a liturgical act, a privileged occasion for human beings to hear and be heard.' And in openly recognising their responsibility to the audience as equal participants in this film event, the makers of *La Hora de los Hornos* have already gone some way towards promoting the 'liberated space' in which national, indigenous values can be re-asserted and reactivated.

The film's method in this first part hinges on a series of antitheses: facts juxtaposed with documentary evidence. Ironic counterpoint as an agitprop device is as old as Eisenstein, but here it is the totality of the film experience which obliges more than a casual, one-way identification. Representation is replaced by participation, the audience becomes the theatre, and the cosy, righteous indignation inspired by so much traditional documentary propaganda disintegrates on its own shaky foundations. The European—and the Europeanised Argentinian—watching this film is forced into an uneasy awareness that my consumption of Argentinian beef is the denial of your dignity. A slaughterhouse sequence, reminiscent in its accusatory coldness of Franju's *Sang des Bêtes*, is counterpointed with television commercials for consumer goods, and a message which rings loud and clear for the workers in the audience whose economic survival is regulated by the vicious circle of dependence: 'Every day we export more and get back the same; every day we work more and earn the same.' Allende's speech at the recent UN conference on trade and development in Santiago spelt out just what this dependence means for the under-developed nations.

The oppositions accumulate. Children from the urban *favelas* race a train to beg at the windows—cut to the skyscrapers of Buenos Aires, whose vaunted cosmopolitanism is mocked in a spoof travelogue sequence, a city built on foreign investment/expropriation and only nominally governed by a bourgeoisie whose testament to their own illusions is equestrian statues to colonial notables and grotesque neo-classical angels adorning their graves. A clip from Joris Ivens' *Le Ciel, La Terre* shows Vietnamese peasants watching the skies for American bombers, but 'the Vietnamese only has to lift his head; for us, it's more difficult,' since in Latin America, 'the war is waged



'The Hour of the Furnaces': '... on this awareness ... can be erected the springboard for liberation'. Top: woodcut of colonial slaves; centre: trade union graphics; bottom: the pervasive influence of popular religion

principally in the minds of men' and for neocolonialists mass communication (control of the media, state religion) is more effective than napalm. Assorted foreign dignitaries ('missionaries of all religions') drop in at the airport, while the home-bred aristocracy parades round the bull ring at prize cattle shows. The intention behind this assemblage of information, and it's brilliantly realised, is to provide a Latin American audience with the facts which will form, or corroborate, their own awareness of their political, economic and cultural dependence; and on this awareness, the film goes on to propose, can be erected the spring-board for liberation.

Like Fanon, Solanas and Getino—and film-makers in other Latin American countries—lay stress on the need to affirm the dignity of national identity. 'Under-development' (*subdesarrollo*) is a word coined by colonialists; and if anyone doubts the extent of cultural dependence, *La Hora de los Hornos* has a sequence in the Salon Pepsi Cola and a celebrated Argentinian novelist attesting his credentials as 'a man of European formation'. (Even a casual reading of Latin American writers—Carlos Fuentes, Alejo Carpentier, Eduardo Mallea, even, if not especially, Jorge Luis Borges—reveals just how deeply imbued in European culture they are.) Cultural alienation is a recurring theme in these films, and its enforcement is seen as systematic and insidious, whether the motive is imperialist infiltration (American economic investment, American-trained counter-revolutionary combat units) or the political and economic oppression of an exploited majority by a minority ruling class. In several Latin American countries (Bolivia, Peru, Guatemala, Mexico, Ecuador) that majority is Indian, and film-makers throughout the sub-continent have responded to this often ignored and, to most white and mixed race Latin Americans, uncomfortable fact—and not only because the wholesale destruction of Indian communities in Brazil has been widely documented abroad. The Bolivian Indians, and their exploitation by foreign as well as indigenous minorities, is the subject of Jorge Sanjines' *Blood of the Condor*.

For Sanjines, systematically engineered ignorance must first be countered by communication. The function of this film and of his earlier *Ukamau*, which the Indians themselves have been encouraged to see, is 'not just to illustrate misery . . . but to denounce the structures of exploitation and power which cause this misery.' So the films are used as communication devices, a counterblast to another kind of communication revealed in *Blood of the Condor*, where American doctors dole out hopelessly ill-fitting shoes to bemused Indians. The Americans are part of a Progress Corps (read Peace Corps) scheme involving the methodical sterilisation of Quechua Indian women without their consent or even their knowledge, a singularly misguided, not to say positively malevolent Third World aid programme in a country whose problems emphatically do not include overpopulation. The Indians' response to this uninvited intervention progresses from bewilderment through fruitless questioning to open resistance, culminating in a ritual nemesis



Cross-currents of politics and religion in 'Terra em Transe'

when they castrate these missionaries of sterility.

So much for one version of foreign aid, and it's worth recording that the film's factual basis is documented evidence of Indian women involuntarily sterilised in an American-financed clinic in La Paz. The message—that ignorance is exploited for ulterior motives veiled as good intentions—is also there for the Indians themselves, which incidentally explains some stylistic simplifications in the film, like the fact that the Americans are unsubtle caricatures. Communication, here as elsewhere, promotes awareness. *Blood of the Condor* is also concerned to reveal to the Indians that their own fellow-countrymen, the whites and *mestizos* of the cities, are actively implicated in their exploitation. The Indian village leaders are executed for their act of resistance; and the brother of one of them, an 'urbanised' Indian stranded between two cultures, meets only indifference and contempt as he seeks medical aid for his wounded brother from a white minority blind to their own material dependence. The brother's forlorn pilgrimage is also his political awakening: he returns to his village, and the film ends with an angry portent as guns are raised to the sky.

In a setting as potentially explosive as that in most Latin American countries, political awareness is the detonator of political action. It is the hour of the furnaces and 'all that need be seen is their light' (this title comes from the 19th century Cuban José Martí, writing of the Indian fires seen by Magellan and the first explorers on the Tierra Del Fuego coast). That setting is exhaustively documented in most of the political films which have emerged from Latin America since the mid-Sixties. In Bolivia, life expectancy for the impoverished majority is little over thirty; in Brazil, the military government openly sanctions torture of arrested dissidents (evidence irrefutably assembled in a documentary indictment, *No Time For Tears*); in Argentina, chronic economic crisis since the fall of Perón has created massive un-

employment. An Argentinian film, *The Road Towards the Death of Old Man Reales*, vividly catalogues the effect of this recession on the northern province of Tucumán, whose economic life is the now hopelessly depressed sugar industry.

This film, made by Gerardo Vallejo, an assistant on *La Hora de los Hornos* and a member of the Grupo Cine Liberación, introduces again the theme of political consciousness as the *sine qua non* of revolutionary change. Old man Reales, stubbornly cherishing a vestige of dignity after long years of unrewarded grind, is reflected in his three sons, each representing a point on the scale of resistance from drunken disillusionment to tentative action. The old man fosters bitter memories; and nothing, apparently, has changed as we watch one of the sons forced to leave home to find work in the south. But as Vallejo digs deeper into the lives of these men (and significantly they are their own spokesmen; the camera records but never intrudes), the options for the future are gradually defined. As Vallejo describes it, the audience is forced into a 'complicity' with what is on the screen, and not only when the old man speaks directly to camera. The only alternatives to despair are death in life or a commitment to action, and by the end of the film one of the old man's sons is a trade union activist.

Action, which in Latin America usually means violence, is built on organisation; spontaneity is examined and roundly rejected as ineffectual in the second part of *La Hora de los Hornos*. For many of these film-makers, the collective spirit which determines organisation as the key to action is reflected in the act of film-making itself. Increasingly, films are made collectively, and with the help and participation of the communities in which they are made. (European film-makers might imitate, as Chris Marker has with films made with and by factory workers in France.) The Bolivian film *Night of San Juan*, made by Jorge Sanjines after *Blood of the Condor*, is perhaps the most significant example of collective film-making in that it effectively

demolishes the myth of production-consumer segregation.

The film is a powerful reconstruction, enacted by survivors, of the Bolivian army massacre of miners in 1967. Sanjines pulls no punches: army officers and government officials are coolly identified in a rogues' gallery of names and faces. Identifying the enemy, though, is secondary to the film's central motif. The miners were decimated primarily because their trade union activities were construed as a threat to the state, which here means the status quo. There have been previous massacres, which the film documents, and there may be more; and that, as Sanjines makes abundantly clear, is why the miners must continue to organise and resist, even as their women fight for food supplies which have mysteriously failed to reach their village. An inspiring sense of community action informs the film, triumphantly celebrated in the final image as the whole community marches past the camera. That Sanjines, who was dismissed from the Film Institute in La Paz which he himself set up, can continue to make films as uncompromising as this, is a testament both to his own absolute commitment and to the enormous potential for collective filmmaking as a key factor in this cinema.

The call to arms is also sounded in the final act of *La Hora de los Hornos*, which takes up Guevara's own call for 'many Vietnams', illustrating the possibilities with film from Cuba, Africa and Vietnam itself. But here again the emphasis is placed on the need to comprehend and analyse the present situation in terms of its historical evolution. Preceding this final act is a long documentary chronicle of Argentina under Perón, and the astonishing survival of *peronismo* since his deposition in 1955. To a European audience, it must be said in passing, the film's almost wholehearted endorsement of Perón may seem a little curious; for all that Perón promoted a national consciousness in Argentinians, it's difficult to ignore the eventual corruption, by bureaucracy and even by the formerly denounced acceptance of North American economic aid, of his always vaguely defined *justicialismo* concept. Be that as it may—and the film does acknowledge the limitation of the Peronist movement—the point is that for Argentinian audiences this barrage of historical information is a useful and indeed necessary first step in the film act's process of galvanising political awareness. Perón's failures as well as his achievements, the spiralling repression of union militancy by the governments of Frondisi, Illia and Onganía, and the constantly hovering spectre of navy intervention in Argentinian politics, all serve to identify the present situation, in which one basis for action may be the startling continuing success of *peronismo* at elections in the absence (in Madrid, of all places) of its founder. Though since the film was made, the guerrilla vanguard of the Argentinian revolutionary left, the MIR, have rejected this basis, and following the lead of groups like the Uruguayan *tupamaros* have chosen to go their own way.

Political history as a pointer to present realities is clearly of paramount importance to many Latin American film-makers. *The Cry of the People*, by Umberto Rios, chronicles Bolivian politics from the Chaco war of 1932 to the Barrientos regime and the

campaigns against Guevara's guerrillas and Colonel Banzer's counter-revolutionary coup. Raymundo Gleyser's *Mexico, the Frozen Revolution* places the socio-political situation of Mexico today in the context of the betrayal of Madero's revolution, effectively dismantling the illusions of those workers in the film who remember the revolution and forget the present, with its 'spontaneous' demonstrations organised by the government. *What is Democracy?* is a history of Colombian politics since 1930, and the part played in them by the CIA. Each of these films ends with a call to resistance and violence, as the only effectual response to the violence of the system.

But the revolution also has a human face. Some of the Latin American films establish the basis for revolutionary action in a humanist analysis of present injustice. An approach which, although it seems superficially to conflict with the theory and practice of film-makers like Solanas, takes its authority after all from the beginnings of Castro's Cuba; it was Castro himself who labelled his revolution as 'humanist', though it may be significant that the label, if not its implications, now seems to have been abandoned. A film like the Chilean Aldo Francia's *Valparaíso, mi Amor*, which charts the progress from petty delinquency to robbery and the threat of prostitution of children whose impoverished father has been jailed for stealing cattle, attests a neo-realist rather than a straight didactic influence, and in its almost celebratory view of a city and its people replaces the bitterness of Buñuel's not dissimilar *Los Olvidados* with at least a kind of optimism.

Less hopeful perhaps, though in its way determinedly humanist, is the Chilean Miguel Littin's *The Jackal of Nahueltoro*, a bitter indictment of a state system which methodically rehabilitates an offender, here a peasant convicted of murdering a woman and her children, only to destroy him with its own sanctioned murder. In his own way, the film suggests, the peasant has achieved a kind of rehabilitation in his ritual act of placing stones on the bodies of his victims. And though it doesn't actually decide in favour of one kind of repentance

over another, the film leaves us in no doubt that the ultimate responsibility for the peasant's act of violence rests with a system which exploits him materially and spiritually destroys him.

The peasant's ritual act is witness to the force of myth and superstition among the uneducated classes of Latin America. And this theme is central to films as different as Ruy Guerra's *Os Fuzis*, along with *Vidas Secas* the harbinger of the Brazilian *cinema novo* movement, and the Cuban Manuel Octavio Gomez's *Days of Water*, which I reviewed from last year's London Festival. It is a theme which recurs in the Brazilian Maurice Capovilla's *The Hunger Prophet*, and of course it is central to Glauber Rocha's *cangaceiro* films as well as to his critique of populism and intellectual sterility in *Terra em Transe*. Glauber Rocha sees the persistence, and the power, of Catholic/African-derived popular mysticism as a positive force, or at least one potential basis for a popular revolution welded out of the contradictions at the root of Brazil's 'permanent state of madness'. Others (Capovilla, the Ruy Guerra of *Os Fuzis* if not of *The Gods and the Dead*) regard this as mystification, a rotting fabric eating away at the foundations of a revolution which can only be soundly built on the soil of political awareness.

These conflicts are still under debate. And if different film-makers have different approaches, that is no bad thing for the future of Latin American political cinema. Evidence of the current political debate, for instance, is assembled in Miguel Littin's *Compañero Presidente*, a dialectical confrontation between President Allende of Chile and Régis Debray; and some of the Cuban critics and film-makers, looking to the mainland from an island pocket of revolution, are openly critical of what they see as reformist deviations among some Latin American film-makers. No matter. Whatever may be their disagreements on the theory and practice of political cinema, all these film-makers would echo Jorge Sanjines: 'Revolutionary cinema does not tell "stories"; it is a cinema which makes history.'

'Blood of the Condor'



# THE WILD BUNCH versus STRAW DOGS

Lawrence Shaffer

If you're going to sit in Plato's cave, you might as well watch good illusions as bad ones. Some years ago a film everyone but Brendan Gill put down, *Duel at Diablo*, became probably the first in history to bridge the hitherto mystical gap between arrows, bullets, what-have-you and actors claiming to be wounded or dead. In *Duel at Diablo* you could see the arrow enter flesh, you could see the blood spurt. Yet the effect was not ghoulishly literal but rather of respecting things as they actually are, those unheralded things that usually get lost among melodramatic or ideological signposts. *Diablo* replaced the easy iconography of taut bow and toppling stunt man with what it's really like to get hurt. The picture began in an inhospitable desert, not the cosily familiar rock formations of Monument Valley but the other side of the moon, where James Garner's worn black gloves were apparently an essential defence against the harsh environment; the gloves suggested that Garner was good at surviving. The film travelled like a side-winder through its uncharted desert, taking detours and unexpected routes. No highway, no signposts, no way to know where it was going.

*The Wild Bunch* is directly descended from *Duel at Diablo*. It is preoccupied with terrain rather than destination. Its energy, direction and pattern are field rather than linear, its main interest the humble, 'superficial' effects of violence formerly concealed by convention. As in *Duel at Diablo* you are initiated into the mysterious rites of penetration, rites whose authenticity is comparable to that of hard porn as opposed to *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* (the one fills in gaps like an honest bricklayer, the other lazily depends on the viewer's sickly fancies to do the filling). *The Wild Bunch* isn't about violence; it shows what it's like to get shot. It isn't about anarchic man; it shows L. Q. Jones running forward from deep space haggling with Strother Martin over stripping a dead man.

This scene, like almost all the others, is a microcosm of the whole film, which is another way of saying that, as in an oriental scroll, each image and event has the same hold on our attention as every other. The running, haggling, and stripping unfolds at its own speed and, though doubtless it reflects some Peckinpah notion of man as jackal, makes the viewer think of nothing else (except, perhaps, the bandits stripping the dead Bogart in *Treasure of Sierra*

*Madre*), and is neither preparation for nor culmination of anything else in the film. What we see is satisfying simply as a perfect illusion of a certain kind of behaviour. The scene is fully involved in its own details. Like the whole film, it assumes that particular states of affairs are more interesting than the generalities they could be used to symbolise.

*The Wild Bunch* is full of particular states of affairs: bullets entering a body, the way a body falls when shot, ants devouring a scorpion, bystanders with no stake in the plot getting shot, how a bottle of whisky just does get consumed by five men before reaching a sixth, the difficulty of mounting a horse when you have a bad knee, the dynamics of falling horses and riders when the bridge they are on collapses, how a man can continue to kill while he himself is in the process of being killed. The continuous violence amounts to a love not of annihilation but of life at its most intense—that is, in extremis. The film attends passionately to its surface. One never asks what's the 'point' of anything in *The Wild Bunch*—what's 'behind it'—because the film is so bristling with perceivable points. Almost everything—Ernest Borgnine's smile, Strother Martin's excited 'It's him!' followed

by his hushed, incredulous 'It is him' in recognition of Holden's body, the machine gun with a jerky will of its own, the 'sloppy seconds' revels of Warren Oates and Ben Johnson, the ruses, jokes and attempted double-crosses—so communicates its presence that ulterior ends, purposes, meanings never suggest themselves.

How, then, could a director who made a film so enthralled by its parts construct another so devoid of moments which have their own independent life that, the eye starved, we are left with the speculating mind wondering about the point of it all? The most reasonable explanation is that when Sam Peckinpah conceived of *Straw Dogs*, he was more interested in 'the point of it all' than in the point by point components of the film. *Straw Dogs*, by default, keeps forcing the viewer beneath its surface into the male adolescent psyche. Our interest in the film is hardly ever immediate; we don't care about the details of anything we see since its purpose is so obviously to signify something else. We're always being pushed beyond, or below, or inside the film's frame. Why is Hoffman the way he is; why did he marry Susan George; why does she take so long to save his life? The surfaces of the film are always at the service of the psychological intentions behind them. Just as bad criticism concerns itself with intentionality, bad art drives the viewer to think about its intentions because of the flimsiness of what meets the eye.

The smell of intentionality is less noisome in *Straw Dogs*' early domestic scenes, where the interactional space between husband and wife and the physical space between



'Straw Dogs': '... the lives taken were never lives to begin with'

them and the surrounding objects in the house are consumed or not consumed in somewhat unexpected ways. But the early scenes are inconclusive. Of little point in themselves, they serve merely as pointers toward the bloody climax, as counterpoint to Hoffman's finally setting his house and marriage in order. Violence in *The Wild Bunch* happens unpredictably out of every corner of the screen, but here it is calculated and stagey. Peckinpah needs to work hard at the climax since even an aroused Hoffman is hardly capable of the kind of samurai carnage required. Furthermore, while in *The Wild Bunch* life is cheap, each of the main characters does have his own life before it is taken from him. But in *Straw Dogs* Peckinpah is so exclusively concerned with Hoffman's redemption that everyone else is sacrificed without ever being treated to lives of their own. So, although it must certainly have seemed a good idea to have Hoffman emerge from his chrysalis and by killing off

each of his tormentors establish himself in the correct male-dominant position over his bitch-tease of a wife, the implementation is implausible and the lives taken were never lives to begin with.

The implausibility reaches its peak in the form of a huge mantrap, calculatedly planted mystery-thriller style in an earlier part of the film (again, such a plant would be totally alien to the seemingly uncalculated flow of *The Wild Bunch*). When first introduced, the mantrap seemed more than two men could handle, but at the climax the puny Hoffman throws it, as if it were papier mâché, neatly over the head of villain number one. The illusion of reality further deteriorates when the trap snaps shut precisely at the jugular, or so it seems as the victim wrestles silently with it as if he was struggling with *The Shadow*. Such a meretricious death would have been shocking in *The Wild Bunch*. Only somewhat more convincingly are the other villains, cardboard cut-outs from the repressed nightmares and, in their defeat, wish-fulfilments of Hoffman's psyche, manipulated into death. The setting for it all is a marvellously solid, stone farmhouse; but, alas, the most palpable thing in the film is just a setting and, even more insultingly, is finally reduced to symbolic value only: a man's home is his castle and Hoffman defends it to make a point. The destruction of the house, as of the various people in the film, goes unmourned. After all, it's for a good cause: Hoffman's psyche. As always, the visible is sacrificed to the invisible.

Another case of manipulation in the film,

'*The Wild Bunch*': '... full of particular states of affairs'



of Peckinpah taking short cuts through intelligence, perception and reality all at once, is David Warner's village idiot. Since the film early accustoms us to accepting nothing and no one at face value, we keep wondering what the Warner character is doing in the film. Well, like everything else he serves ultimate purposes. Inevitably, Warner, or rather, the stereotyped dummy he plays, gets into trouble, provoking the final crisis and thus becoming the vehicle for Hoffman's metamorphosis. He is also used as yet another would-be rapist of Susan George, joining the mayhem at the end, like a tackler jumping on top of other tacklers, to bolster the general violence. Warner gets no attention *per se*. He is there only in so far as he is useful. He serves Peckinpah, but unfortunately Peckinpah never serves him.

It is not the sophomoric philosophy of *Straw Dogs* that is infuriating (intellectualism is equated with passivity and both must be punctured by physically assertive manhood), but the way the philosophy strangles the film. There is all the difference between an idea taking over a film and a film taking over an idea. If a film's superstructure is sufficiently open-ended, as the picaresque framework of *The Wild Bunch* clearly is, it acts seminally, as a spur, a point of departure. In *Straw Dogs* the schematism of virile, brainless mesomorphs versus the intellectual recluse boxes the film in, so that anything that doesn't feed the antithesis is felt as either diversionary or nebulous. There's nothing for Hoffman to do for most of the film except be the 98 lb. weakling getting sand kicked in his face. His character, like the film, can only mark time, providing the requisite dead spot against which the final release of energy can explode in relief.

Thesis films are still-born. They don't grow one inch from their initial premise. A film that sheds light on what might be called the *Straw Dogs* syndrome, Michael Winner's *The Nightcomers*, consists of the flashback that Henry James 'forgot' to insert in *The Turn of the Screw*. *The Nightcomers*' thesis is that Quint and Miss Jessel did corrupt their charges, Miles and Flora, and so the film is committed to spelling out the details of what it conceives of as corruption. The effectiveness of James' tale is in its ellipses. *The Nightcomers* diligently fills in these suggestive holes with the details of its thesis. What in James' story were the scary phantoms of Quint and Jessel are given ordinary embodiments, and the manner in which they corrupt the children amounts to some mildly shocking sexual perversions and a few atheistic comments by Quint. The viewer comes away saying, 'Yes, well, that hole's filled up now. But is that all that happened?'

It seems that documenting an idea, even so potentially dramatic an idea as the corruption of children by adults, is as tedious as counting backwards from one hundred. The only question is what disappointing example of corruption will come next, just as in the ending of *Straw Dogs* the only question is what unlikely device will next be used to destroy another of the bullyboys. In both films the seminal idea turns out to be embalming fluid. What few moments of life *The Nightcomers* has are like the little sporadic movements of insects who are

futilely trying to work free of a web. Marlon Brando as Quint is given scenes and dialogue that don't always conform to the stereotype of corrupter—in fact he often seems a rather warm, jolly companion for the parentless children—but such moments come off only as anomalies, operating as they do so obviously against the film's intended grain. Brando, as usual, manages to lead a life of his own beyond the prescribed limits of the character. His films may be imprisoned by an idea but he goes free. Hoffman, however, not nearly so lucky in his talents, scrupulously 'does characters', so that even more than *The Nightcomers*, *Straw Dogs* is an exercise in ventriloquism.

What needs to be rejected is certainly not the existence of ideas in a film, only the subordination of a film to an idea. In *My Night with Maud*, whose Marxist philosophy professor is perhaps the most convincing portrayal of an intellectual in all film, the characters talk a good deal about ideas—Pascal, Catholic doctrine, free love—simply for the sake of intellectual discussion, as real people do, and also because the ideas serve as rationalisations and explanations for behaviour. As in real life, the ideas belong to the characters, not the reverse; which is why one walks jauntily out of *My Night with Maud*, uplifted and flattered by having been with complex, autonomous people, and staggers out of *Straw Dogs*, deflated and insulted by having been with puppets. It's hard to imagine the Peckinpah of *Straw Dogs* hating a film more than *My Night with Maud*, filled, as he must see it, with bloodless intellectualising and unmanly restraint. But the irony is that it is *Straw Dogs* that is fettered by ideas and *My Night with Maud* that achieves the existentialist freedom so dear to Peckinpah's heart.

The embracing of an idea, the compulsion to demonstrate a point, has carried many a director away from the pleasurable unassuming 'thinginess' of his early films to the arid schematism and thesis-mongering of later 'more ambitious' efforts. Think of Huston going from the palpability of *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Asphalt Jungle* to the moralising of *The Roots of Heaven* and *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison* (turning from earth to heaven is almost always fatal to perception), Schlesinger from the density of *A Kind of Loving* to the dialectics of *Midnight Cowboy*, Truffaut from *Les quatre cents coups* to *Fahrenheit 451* (partially redeemed by the stunning physicalisation of words by means of burning pages), de Broca from *The Love Game* to *King of Hearts*, Kubrick from *The Killing* to *A Clockwork Orange*, Fellini from *La Strada* to almost everything thereafter.

Projects become governed by a ruling idea, and where the director used to linger humbly along the byways of his perception he now hurries to make his grandiose point. For recent films whose dense texture and 'thinginess' successfully defy their conceptual frameworks, see *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, *The Hospital* and *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*. For the difference between soul-satisfying credibility of detail and point-hopping, compare the hospital scenes in *The Hospital* with those in *Such Good Friends*. What becomes clear is that the worst crime in films, as in life, is the substitution of concept for percept. ■

# KANIN



# TALKING

**An Interview with  
Penelope Houston and  
John Gillett**

Garson Kanin was in London recently for the publication of *Tracy and Hepburn*, his reminiscent study of two old friends and colleagues. Kanin has run the gamut of show business, from short story writer to theatre and television director, to film director and writer. Born in Rochester, New York, he was an actor in the 1930s and worked as assistant to the famous stage director George Abbott; since the war, his stage productions have included *Fledermaus*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Funny Girl*, *A Hole in the Head*, as well as several of his own plays (notably *Born Yesterday*) and those of his actress/writer wife, Ruth Gordon. Unlike other major Hollywood writing talents, Kanin began his film career as a director (from 1938 to 1941), until war service took him to Europe and, eventually, collaboration with Carol Reed on the Anglo-American compilation, *The True Glory*. After the war, he returned to scriptwriting on the distinguished series of comedies featuring Tracy, Hepburn and Judy Holliday. He came back to direction once again in 1969 with *Some Kind of a Nut* and *Where It's At*.

*Above: Hepburn and Tracy in 'Pat and Mike'*

When I went to Hollywood in 1937 to work for Samuel Goldwyn, I went out as a nothing, a kind of cipher. What I had in mind was to direct films; but that wasn't Goldwyn's idea at all. In fact I don't know what he wanted of me, except to have me work for him. He used to call me 'Thalberg' all the time . . . He'd say, 'Well, Thalberg, what do you think . . . ?' and then he'd howl with laughter. I began to think that one of the reasons he hired me and paid me 250 dollars a week was just so he could call me Thalberg and laugh. I went out there ostensibly to learn the business, and I think he wanted me to develop into some sort of righthand man, someone to do the things he was getting too tired to do himself, primarily in the ice-cold field of motion picture producing. That had no interest for me then or now; I have never been less interested in a subject than I am in motion picture producing. Then, after the year at Goldwyn's, I went to RKO, where eventually I got a chance to direct a picture written by Dalton Trumbo, *A Man to Remember*. And then I went on and did seven pictures at RKO before I was drafted into the army. So in those early years I wasn't a writer at all; I was a contract film director at RKO.

### 'My Writers . . .'

People talk now about a 'writers' cinema' of the 1930s, but I never observed the position of a writer in Hollywood as being anything possessed of the slightest dignity, or given any particular importance. Once in a great while . . . when Damon Runyon had a string of successful films, they perhaps found that

identifying the picture as a Damon Runyon story helped the publicity. Or a Somerset Maugham story, maybe . . . Otherwise, I can't remember a writer being given any kind of billing that you could see from the road, without walking through the mud, through the ditch, with a magnifying glass up to the billboard to find the writer's credit. And then it was the same size type, or a little smaller, as the firm that had printed the sign.

A director would always refer to 'my writers'. I remember getting a great rehearsal laugh, when just after the war I was directing Spencer Tracy on Broadway in a Robert Sherwood play called *The Rugged Path*. Spencer asked me a question about something in the text, and I told him, 'I'm not sure, but let me ask my writer.' Well, Spencer just collapsed at that, referring to Robert E. Sherwood as 'my writer'. But the joke was that that's how people talked about writers in Hollywood. Writers are something that you own, or that you buy, or that you trade, or that you throw overboard, but a writer is a thing, a menial. And this obviously happened because when feature films began to be made in Hollywood, there wasn't really any need for writers. For a while there weren't even any titles. Titles came in a bit later, and then they decided that you needed someone to write them. I remember once going on a set at RKO when Edward Ludwig was directing *Swiss Family Robinson*. There were about three hundred animals, making every kind of noise under the sun, and I asked Eddie how he could get any satisfactory recording. Eddie said, 'Oh, that doesn't matter. We're going to put the titles in later . . . ' Anything that

was spoken was still a title to him; and that stayed in the mind of some of those silent picture directors who went over.

When I was working at Goldwyn's, down the hall from my office there would be Lillian Hellman, Dorothy Parker and Alan Campbell, Sidney Howard, Robert Sherwood, Donald Ogden Stewart, Anita Loos and John Emerson, Bella and Sam Spewack, Dudley Nichols . . . They were all working for Goldwyn then, and it's a pretty distinguished list of American writers. And yet they were simply not important. In fact, Goldwyn had some scatterbrained idea at the time . . . Someone at a dinner party had told him that American women spent thirty-three billion dollars a year in beauty parlours, and this got him to thinking that there might be a great picture in the beauty business. And then someone came up with a title, *You Can Be Beautiful*. He was a sucker for titles and he just loved that one: he'd say it over and over again. So he hired Dorothy Parker and Alan Campbell to work out a story. This was the way it would start: a subject, a title, that's all . . . nothing. It wasn't coming along very well, and he very quietly went out and got Lillian Hellman and told her about this great subject, *You Can Be Beautiful*. Then he had Donald Ogden Stewart working on something quite different, and one day he impulsively mentioned it to *him*. This went on until one day they were all sitting around at lunch, and Lillian happened to ask Dottie what she was working on. Dottie said, 'Oh, some nutty thing about beauty parlours.' And Lillian said, 'You don't mean *You Can Be Beautiful* . . . ?' Well, it turned out that *five* of the highly paid writers around that table were working on the same assignment. Of course nothing ever came of it.

'Bachelor Mother': David Niven and Ginger Rogers



### The Cowboy and the Lady

Goldwyn's fascination with titles leads me to a story about Leo McCarey. He was a marvellous salesman, and I think needed some money at one time, so he came in to tell Goldwyn a story, which was quite common practice at the time. There would be nothing written down, a guy would just come in and tell a story, and there got to be some tremendous experts at this. Hecht and MacArthur were, I suppose, the most famous of the Scheherazades.

So we all assembled in Goldwyn's office and in came McCarey—handsome, witty, full of Irish charm and marvellous comic intelligence. 'Well,' he said, 'I'll tell you what I've got, Sam. This man, well, he's a cowboy. It's not a Western, Sam, but the man is . . . how can I describe him? You might say, for instance, Gary Cooper. Now, the girl in the picture is an heiress, a real Park Avenue society girl . . . well, I don't know where she's working right now, but you might cast someone like Merle Oberon.' He just threw it off, knowing full well that Cooper and Oberon were under contract to Goldwyn and that he was hard up for pictures for both of them. McCarey went on, 'It's a story about this heiress who goes out West for a holiday, and on a ranch she meets this fellow, and of course they can hardly understand each other talking. But, you know, love . . .'

I looked at Goldwyn and I could see that

he was hooked. And McCarey must have recognised the crucial moment because he said, 'And hey, I've just thought of a title for that picture: *The Cowboy and the Lady*.' That did it; all bets were off. And Leo just went on babbling about nothing: 'And then there's this rodeo, I mean, Jesus Christ, a rodeo, and I tell you when they see that Gary Cooper they'll piss, they'll just piss.' At what he hadn't told us yet, of course. Finally Goldwyn said, 'Would you excuse me, gentlemen,' and that was our cue to leave. Apparently after we left, McCarey said that he didn't want to do anything but sell the story, for 50,000 dollars; and next morning, at the meeting, Goldwyn told us all that he had purchased this new property, *The Cowboy and the Lady*, as a vehicle for Gary Cooper and Merle Oberon.

McCarey, of course, had no idea of a story or anything like it, but he dictated a few pages and they showed it to various writers. When they said to Goldwyn, 'But this is nothing,' he replied, 'What the hell do you know about it!' Now that he'd paid 50,000 dollars, it meant that it was worth 100,000, because otherwise he wouldn't have paid 50,000 for it. So he finally got, I think, Anita Loos and John Emerson to work on it, with just those two characters, and they tried to invent some sort of a story. At which point, the bomb fell on the studio. Goldwyn received a letter from Paramount Pictures officially informing him that *The Cowboy and the Lady* was a title that they owned, because it was indeed the title of a play by Clyde Fitch which had been rather successfully produced by David Belasco at the turn of the century, and it was now theirs. They didn't plan to make it and the title was for sale, but unless he did purchase it would he please cease and desist from announcing it.

A black week followed at the Goldwyn Studios. He was furious. And then he instructed someone to negotiate with Paramount and found they wanted 100,000 dollars for the title—for those five words. So he put everyone in the writers' building to work finding a new title for *The Cowboy and the Lady*, and for several days we all just wrote titles and he didn't like any of them. Eventually I suggested to Sam Marx, the story editor, that we should try to get two words that at least *sounded* like the same name. He wrote words like 'cowpoke', 'cowhand', 'ranchman', and I wrote 'heir-ess', 'madcap', 'girl', and we tried putting them together and they didn't sound good at all. Then we tried symbols, and finally we came up with 'Cactus and Orchids'. We went dashing into Goldwyn's office. 'Eureka,' we said. 'We've got it.' He visibly brightened, and then a dark cloud came over his face: 'No, it's no good.' 'Why, Mr. Goldwyn, why isn't it good?' 'Because, Thalberg, I'll tell you why it isn't any good. You see, people who know what orchids are don't know what cactus is, and people who know what cactus is don't know what orchids are...'

In the end, he did buy the title from Paramount, and indeed the picture was made with Gary Cooper and Merle Oberon. It went out, and it was lousy, and it did some business; they still show it on television once in a while. But I think you get a picture from that of how a front office, or a guy who really owned and operated a studio, could use writers.

## Final Cut

I don't think any director has ever made a good picture out of a lousy script, though they have frequently made very bad pictures out of good scripts. Even when I was a director, I was constantly saying that what matters is the script: that if you gave a really expert screenplay to a reasonably intelligent, technical director, and if he really did the script and didn't horse around with it, the chances were that you might come up with a picture. The examples of this are legion. There was one director who was the nearest thing to a cretin you can imagine, who had two big hits in his career simply through shooting very good scripts exactly as they were given to him—of course, he made about fifteen horrors in between. Alternatively, someone like Lubitsch, who never I think had a writing credit in his life, certainly inspired the invention and the writing and sometimes just infused it with what they called the Lubitsch touch. So that, apart from actually sitting down at a typewriter, he was very much a writer.

Or there were Warner directors, for instance, who never got near a script. It's no secret that Michael Curtiz sometimes started shooting a script without reading it. He would make about four pictures a year, which at those studios wasn't unusual. They would be prepared almost entirely by the front office, they'd be cast and the sets would be designed. And then they would say, 'Well, Mike Curtiz, he's finishing Thursday... Do you want him to start on Monday? No, make it Tuesday.' They'd call him in and say, 'You're going to start this on Tuesday.' He'd say, 'What is it?' And they'd say, 'Well, it's *The Charge of the Light Brigade*.' —'What's that?' —'Well, you'll see...' He would then maybe read it, or maybe not. The director would do his part of the job and the film went to the cutter and he put it together. Frequently a director at Warners wouldn't even see his assembled stuff. It was all organised, assembly line stuff, and I think that's one reason why the general run of pictures was so bland.

Of course there were special cases. Leo McCarey was very powerful, and after George Stevens was on his way, he could make very stringent demands—and get them. But I would also say this: in all my years in Hollywood, and later, I never knew a director who had the final say on his work. Not one. John Ford in his palmiest days never had the final cut. William Wyler never had it. Nor La Cava, Hawks, Mamoulian, Capra. None of these men. And if you talked to the producers and heads of the studios, they would say, 'Why should they? It's our money. If they want to make pictures with their own money, let them go and do it, but as long as it's our money the final decision is ours. If we want to cut a picture, we're going to. It belongs to us.' And of course very few directors had any financial interest in the picture itself. That came in much later. For the most part, they were employees who got paid so much per week. Not even by the year; they were paid by the week, on Fridays, like employees. That's what made the world go round...

Even later... You've assumed that the scripts by Ruth Gordon and myself were filmed almost exactly as we wrote them. The

fact is they weren't; they were subject to story conferences, and always a little spoilage, some little compromise. They were just not quite as good in the end as they were at the beginning. And of course, having been paid for the script, we no longer had any rights; we'd sold our whole copyright... They are just now developing a television series out of *Adam's Rib*. I was working at Metro when the idea came up, on the lot and seeing Jim Aubrey almost every day. But not only did he not ask me to do anything about the television series, he didn't even tell me they were thinking about it. So, as you can see, there are vestiges of front office power still in existence. Very much so at Universal, for instance, which is still a bastion of a front office operation. It has broken down tremendously in the last five years, of course, and there are beginning to be cases of directors who have the final cut. Mike Nichols on *Carnal Knowledge* did indeed have a contractual final cut. But all this is only in the last few years: before that, there was no director, no writer, no film artist, who had the real final say in his work.

## B-Pictures at RKO

My own start as a director... When I went to RKO, after the year of disappointment at Goldwyn's, I felt I didn't want to waste any more time. So I asked Pandro Berman, the perfectly congenial head of the studio, if we could have an understanding: either I would get a picture going there within, say, three months, or I would quit and go back to New York. Berman agreed, after some hesitation, and I started right in, knocking on producers' doors and raising hell and bringing in stories. I just couldn't get anywhere, but after about a month Pandro Berman sent me a script and said that if I wanted to direct it I could start in ten days. It was a Western with George O'Brien; you can imagine my excitement, because I thought, 'Christ, I'll make the greatest Western ever made.' Well, I read it, and of course it was ghastly. I got to a point in the script where it said 'He fans his gun', and I thought, 'What the hell is that...?' So I went back to Berman, and said, 'Pan, I'm very grateful for the opportunity but I wouldn't be any good at all on this picture. I had to ask six people what fanning his gun meant...' He said, 'Well, you don't have to know that.' But he offered to try to find me something else, and a couple of weeks later he sent me a script called *Sorority House*... I don't need to tell you any more.

I went back to Berman and told him I thought I'd rather do the one about fanning the gun. If this was the only kind of stuff they could give me, perhaps we should call the whole thing off. He told me I was very foolish, and mentioned how George Stevens began, and how Capra was a gag man for Sennett. And I said, 'Yes, but what you don't understand is that right now nobody around here knows who I am. But if I make one of those pictures they *will* know...'

So it was all off. I went back to the studio each evening to sort out the stuff in my office, and across the hall there was a guy working every night, banging a typewriter. One night we happened to stop at the same time and introduced ourselves, and this was how I met Dalton Trumbo. He told me about the story he was working on, using the

skeleton of a John Barrymore picture about a country doctor they had done at the studio a few years before. We started talking about the story, and I think I came up with some ideas about telling it in film terms, and after about three weeks we had something we thought was pretty good. Together we took it to Bob Sisk, a B-picture producer on the lot and a very nice man. He liked the *A Man to Remember* script enormously. 'The only trouble,' he said, 'is that I don't know what kind of money I can get you to make it, or even if they would want to make it. But if it can be done very quickly and cheaply, we might be able to make it before they get wise.'

That, indeed, is exactly what happened. The picture had an 18-day schedule but it was shot in 15 days—mainly out of terror. I was so scared that if I went one day over they'd fire me, that I just kept on shooting. At the end of the fifteenth day, I asked the cutter, 'What do we do tomorrow?' And he said, 'Nothing. We've finished.' I had no idea I'd finished the picture. And of course, having shot it in fifteen days at a cost of 84,000 dollars, I then had it in the cutting room for over three months. That budget even then was considered kind of nothing, because most of the B-pictures they made cost about 200,000 dollars.

Then the picture just went out, was shown at a few places, and suddenly began to get some very respectable reviews. Pandro Berman had never seen a foot of it, but he heard about it and asked to see it. To his credit, he thought it was superior, so he booked a big Broadway theatre, the Rivoli (it's still there, *Fiddler on the Roof* has been playing there), and put this little 84,000 dollar picture in. Of course he didn't tell anyone that it had already been in RKO release for about six weeks.

I was given another assignment while I was still trying to put together *A Man to Remember*—a Lucille Ball picture called *Next Time I Marry*. I read the script and it was absolute nonsense, it was just cuckoo. But I was terrified that if I made a fuss they might take me off *A Man to Remember*, so I got hold of my brother [Michael Kanin] and we ignored the script and just wrote a few days ahead. I never consulted the producer or the front office: I just went ahead and made a picture. And although it couldn't have been very good in the circumstances, at least the picture got put together and it got released.

By this time *A Man to Remember* had come out and I was in a much better position at the studio. I'd made friends with a writer called John Twist, who gave me a script to read called *The Great Man Votes*. I knew I could make a good picture out of it if I could get John Barrymore to play the lead, and although he was completely *persona non grata* at the studio (he had done some terrible things, like starting a picture and disappearing), they finally relented and agreed to have him. He was marvellous, and the picture turned out very well. It was shot in about 24 days and cost something over 200,000 dollars, but it played the Radio City Music Hall—the first and only B-picture, I think, that ever played there.

Of course on a cheap picture you couldn't afford locations, and all the street scenes were done inside on the stage. There was

one scene I needed of the little boy and his sister walking home from school talking about their father, and because it had a certain length to it I had to walk them round and round the block and there wasn't enough background. Russell Metty and I tried everything, but it just wouldn't work. I was walking along the sidewalk with my head down, and I suddenly thought I'd try something . . . we'd just shoot the kids' feet walking home. I had the little girl (Virginia Weidler) walking on the cracks and the little boy kicking a can, and we were able to take them around the whole set shooting just on their feet. Well, the picture previewed in Hollywood, and as that shot came on and continued, and continued, there was a great burst of applause; and my career as an 'important' director was launched at that given moment. When the picture went out, I don't think there was a film critic who didn't mention that shot. But it was created out of sheer necessity . . .

## My Favourite Wife

*My Favourite Wife* . . . That, of course, was produced by Leo McCarey; and if you think the end of the picture is rather like *The Awful Truth*, I think McCarey meant it that way. He chose me to be the director; he had a story—something like *The Cowboy and the Lady*—and he got in the Spewacks, who were crackerjack writers. I knew them well because I worked in the theatre on their play *Boy Meets Girl*. In fact, I was an actor in the original company, and as George Abbott's assistant I directed several touring companies of the play. McCarey was at every script conference but he never actually wrote anything. He'd often suggest a quick gag, quite tasteless often but always funny. My job was to be the referee between him and the Spewacks, who would be walking out every half-hour when he suggested

something outlandish.

Eventually the script was evolved, Cary Grant and Irene Dunne were all set, and then the weekend before shooting was to start McCarey was very badly smashed up in a car accident. The studio couldn't postpone the picture, and when I went to see McCarey in hospital, all splints and casts and bandages, he asked me to go ahead. So, just using the front office as a production facility, I shot the picture. It took about eight weeks, and during the last fortnight McCarey started to come on the set for an hour or two a day. They showed him the assembled stuff; some of it he liked, and some of it he didn't like at all, and some things he wanted reshot. And then he began to edge the climax towards *The Awful Truth* ending, and although the Spewacks and I had other ideas, he was the producer. So that's the way it went.

Curiously, I suppose that from a commercial point of view *My Favourite Wife* is the most successful picture I ever made: it grossed the most money and made the most money for the studio. And of all the pictures I directed, it's the one I like least. It seems quite mechanical and manufactured, yet I can't deny that it always plays very well with an audience. Cary, at that moment in his career, was about as expert and precise a farceur as one could imagine; Irene had just found her way into that easy style and I thought she was enchanting. But I'm embarrassed by a lot of it. I mean, the woman standing up and saying, 'Don't worry, I'm perfectly able to look after myself,' and stepping into the pool isn't really my idea of the greatest comic moment in history. When Leo suggested it, he said, 'They'll piss'. The funny thing is that they never do; they do at other things that are perhaps less obvious. But when you began to work with those guys whose roots were very deep in Mack Sennett and Harold Lloyd and Hal Roach, you found that they couldn't resist something like that. Their idea of the great moment was Irene Dunne falling into the pool, and there was no way of talking them out of it. I did it; I hated shooting it; I couldn't bear that day; and finally it was over, thank God.

I would say that *Tom, Dick and Harry* was my favourite among the pictures I directed at RKO. I thought *They Knew What They Wanted* had some beautiful stuff in it, but then it had trouble with the censor and we had to soften some of the punch. But *Tom, Dick and Harry* was the beginning of something. I had a lot to do with that script; and it was really the beginning of a style which I've been told is particularly my own. I can't see it as objectively as others can, but it did eventually culminate in things like *Born Yesterday* and *Adam's Rib*—the style being the treatment of a very serious subject in comic terms.

When I began writing *Born Yesterday*, it started as a movie script. I was in the army and had a room at Claridge's . . . every line of *Born Yesterday* was written in room 602 at Claridge's, during the first buzz bombs. The notion was to write a blistering Washington exposé, but as I got deeper into it I saw that if I wrote it as a movie I'd never be able to sell it; it would be too censorable. I didn't want to soften it, so I thought I'd try it as a play, never having written a play before. And as it went on, it simply metamorphosed



'The Great Man Votes': the children (Virginia Weidler, Peter Holden) and their elders



Jane Seymour, Ginger Rogers and Joe Cunningham in 'Tom, Dick and Harry'

into a comedy, although the essence of the serious theme remained. It's rather the same with *Adam's Rib*. I feel deeply about Women's Rights in America—I feel more deeply than perhaps some women do, because I think the failure to recognise women as equal citizens makes it very hard on men. I think women should share the whole damn thing with us. *Adam's Rib* is of course full of funny stuff, but it's also about something important. *The Great Man Votes* is a comedy, but it's about a serious thing, the practice of American democracy. So if any single style can be traced in my work, I suppose it is that.

## Collaboration with Cukor

At the end of the war, I was involved with Carol Reed in *The True Glory*, which meant about twenty months work, and seeing ten million feet of film. And then I produced on Broadway *The Rugged Path* and *Born Yesterday*, and my wife's play *Years Ago*, with Fredric March.

Those things turned out pretty well on the whole, but there was still a period of five years during which I hadn't really earned a penny, and the quickest way I knew to make some money was to write an original screenplay. So Ruth and I wrote *A Double Life* and took it to California and sold it to Bill Goetz, who had just gone into the formation of a new company called Universal-International. We brought in George Cukor as director, my brother Michael was the producer, and for the lead I tried to get Robert Donat. I thought that essential sweetness Donat had in his own personality, contrasted with the monster he becomes, would have been really dramatic. I came to England and talked to him about it, but he was afraid of the physical strain of the part. Ronald Colman took a good whack at it, but of course you could never really see him as a Shakespearean actor... The picture was all right, it was quite a critical success, but unfortunately it cost too much. It was a little over two million dollars, which in 1947 was a lot of money for a movie.

George Cukor was my choice as director for *A Double Life*: he had the theatre background and wouldn't flub off the *Othello* side of it. Of course we had been friends for years before that, and my wife had worked with him in the theatre, in the stock company he ran at Rochester, New York. I met him later, when he came up to me one day at a Screen Directors' Guild meeting and said, 'You're the kid from Rochester, aren't you?' He befriended me and would have me over to his house, where one afternoon I met Garbo and almost fell into the swimming pool like Irene Dunne out of the sheer excitement of it all. I liked George very much, but the question of working together never came up at that time because he was at Metro and I was at RKO. Then after *A Double Life* we sold *Adam's Rib* to Dore Schary at MGM, and he and Kate and Spencer were all at the studio.

I think I tell in *Tracy and Hepburn* just about everything that anybody could want to know about the origins of *Adam's Rib*. The original script was bought by Metro for I think the highest price they had ever paid for an original: they paid 175,000 dollars. Then all sorts of things happened, like getting the supporting players together,



'I didn't want to see that whole stock company of bit players...' Tom Ewell, Jean Hagen, Judy Holliday, David Wayne in 'Adam's Rib'



'The Marrying Kind': Phyllis Povah, Judy Holliday



'It Should Happen to You': Judy Holliday and Jack Lemmon

and it was really us, as a little unit, doing everything. We worked on the script with Dore Schary and Kate and Spence; we got Orry Kelly in on the clothes; Kate went out and got Cole Porter to write the song. Ruth and I went to work with the designer, Cedric Gibbons, and one day he looked up at us and said, 'You know, this is an historic day. I've been at the studio twenty-five years, and this is the first time writers have ever been in my office...'

I don't suppose I can do it any more, but there was a time when I could walk into any theatre and look at the screen and tell you

what company had made the picture. That hard line Warners always had, the very sharp focus; and the rococo Paramount style. As Lubitsch once said to me, 'I've been to Paris, France, and I've been to Paris, Paramount. I think I prefer Paris, Paramount...' I would know a Metro picture at once, and I didn't like that, so on *Adam's Rib* we tried to kill that Metro look. I didn't want to see that whole stock company of bit players, which was why we fought so hard for Tom Ewell and David Wayne and the others. Gibbons came right along with us, too, and gave us another look. They had a courtroom at Metro that had been used in about 500 pictures, and somehow we convinced them that they ought to have a different courtroom. We did it by shooting the New York scenes first, so that when they came to match them with the interior they just had to build a new courtroom... To me, *Adam's Rib* was the first Metro picture that didn't look like a Metro picture: it took off in a different way.

## Serious Things and Funny People

After *Adam's Rib* came *Born Yesterday*, and by that time we were all very interested in Judy Holliday. *The Marrying Kind* came about because I was arguing with Harry Cohn about the five year contract he had with Judy. He was getting up all sorts of dumb blonde pictures for her, and I said, 'You'll ruin her, you'll turn her into a Penny Singleton or a Joan Davis. This girl is much better than that. You have to explore the rest of her, and she might develop into an important dramatic actress for you.' He couldn't see it, so just on speculation—there wasn't a penny involved—we sat down and wrote *The Marrying Kind* with the notion that this could be the transition picture for Judy. The concept was that serious things can happen to funny people: Charlie Chaplin *could* be murdered; Harold Lloyd, hanging on to that clock, *could* fall off. In this case, two essentially comical people could be faced with the death of a child or the failure of a marriage.

That was how *The Marrying Kind* was constructed, and it was rather a cunning piece of design. On the screen, I think it went a little too much in the direction of Judy's comedy acting—she lost her nerve a bit, and maybe George Cukor even lost his. But as I look at that picture, with all its faults and its flaws, it's the one I'm fondest of. It had no particular success in America, though it did all right. But it came at the explosion point of the blacklist, and the day the picture opened in New York there were twenty American Legion pickets outside the theatre, picketing against Judy Holliday. And of course the threat of picketing wherever the picture played meant that it lost half its bookings. Judy herself took a very firm and courageous line. She wouldn't knuckle under or say what they wanted her to say; and she didn't work for quite a while after that.

Then came *Pat and Mike*, which was a picture we had written for Kate and Spencer almost immediately after *Adam's Rib*, but which was delayed for various reasons. And then the sad story of *It Should Happen to You*... That was an original screenplay which I wrote without Ruth, because by this

time we had realised that we shouldn't try to write anything together again. We didn't quarrel in private life, but when we wrote together it was agony, and it was beginning to threaten our marriage. Actually, our collaboration was different on every film. *A Double Life* was my idea, we talked about it endlessly, and I wrote one complete draft. Ruth made about five hundred notes, and we sat down together and went through it shot by shot and line by line. On *Adam's Rib* we split up the work: Ruth did some scenes and I did some, and then we put them together. Most of Judy's stuff I wrote, because by now I understood that tone and style and that girl. She made her first appearance, I suppose, in *Bachelor Mother*—that Ginger Rogers girl, that open, honest, bland, funny, sexy girl that I had something to do with. There she was again in *Tom, Dick and Harry*, and in another guise in *Born Yesterday*, and of course in *The More the Merrier*, which I wrote with Bob Russell. In one way or another, I seem to have kept writing about that girl.

Anyway, I had this notion of the girl putting her name on the signs, and I wrote an original screenplay called *A Name for Herself* and took it to Harry Cohn. He asked if I would like to direct it, and we started to work on the deal. I'm not sure of the figures, but I think he was going to pay 100,000 dollars for the script and the same for directing, and then I would be a one third partner in the profits. It was all under way, and I went to Harry Cohn and told him I had just one condition. I promised that I wouldn't change anything in the script without his O.K., and that I'd come in on schedule and on budget and make sure he had no censorship trouble. The condition was that I wanted the final cut. 'O.K.,' he said, 'you've got it. But it won't be in the contract. But it has to be in the contract, Harry, I said. 'What if you die?' At that, of course, he almost *did* die on the spot. We argued back and forth, and in the end he said something which I think tells you a lot about the way films have always been made in Hollywood. 'I'm going to give you the final cut,' he said. 'I trust you. But I can't put it in the contract, because the moment it goes in, Stevens wants it in *his* contract, and then everybody else wants it. And next thing the Board of Directors wonder why they're paying me all that money to run the studio when these guys have the final say on their pictures.'

After that, I evolved a new idea: I offered to give him the script for nothing, and to direct the picture for nothing. If the picture was a failure, I'd have earned nothing, and if it was a success we'd split the profits 50-50. He called me the biggest jerk he'd ever met in the business, berated me mercilessly, held out all sorts of inducements. But in the end I told him it was just no good. 'I haven't directed in films for that reason: I simply can't go on the set every morning knowing that some day four or five months hence someone is going to take the scissors and cut the stuff up any way he wants to do it.'

So it was all over. I did sell him that script, *A Name for Herself*, and they changed the title to *It Should Happen to You* and made some cockeyed changes in the film itself. In particular they altered the ending, which in the original was charming and very cinematic. Among my unmade screenplays,

there's another original I wrote for Judy Holliday called *A Nice Place to Visit*. It's a story about a New York girl who is on her way to the airport to take a holiday when she realises she can't bear to leave the city—so she takes her two week holiday in New York, discovering the city for the first time. There was some trouble with Judy Holliday, and they suspended her and didn't have anyone else to play it. And then Judy died and there it is.

Columbia owns *A Nice Place to Visit*. Metro owns two screenplays, a love story called *A Day At a Time* which was being developed for Lana Turner and Robert Mitchum, and *Flight to the Island*, which is the only screenplay I've written out of somebody else's material. It was based on a short story by Elizabeth Enright—a one-day, picaresque story about a man who decides to chuck it all and goes off, has adventures, and then at the end of the day comes back. That was supposed to be Spencer. We worked on it, and everything was fine, and then something happened and it never got made. There's also a late collaboration by Ruth and myself called *Don't Trust Anybody Over 30*, based on a magazine piece I'd read. And *Flight of the Nez Perce*, the big Western Fred Zinnemann and I were going to do together. We were both very enthusiastic about it, but the cost became more and more prohibitive. Recently I was at MGM working on a picture called *The Golden Years Caper*, in which Ruth was to be involved, about a group of senior citizens who embark on a life of crime. Somehow that hasn't yet got off the ground. A lot of unrealised dreams are lying around in those vaults.

## Television and Movies

Of course I've done television work. I was involved in a disastrous series at CBS in 1964 or 1965. I had published quite a few short stories, set mainly on Broadway or in Hollywood, and Jim Aubrey, who was then head of CBS, and David Susskind said they would like to make them into a TV series if I could provide them with one continuing character. In the theatre district of Manhattan, where 100,000 people turn up every night, we still have mounted policemen—it looks incongruous seeing a man on horseback riding about Broadway at night, but it's rather sensible, because the height gives him an advantage and he can get in and out of traffic. When the theatre crowds have gone in, he takes his mount into an alley, gives it some oats, and then goes into a bar and has a drink himself.

I thought a marvellous character for the series could be that cop on horseback, and we played with it for a while but it didn't seem to work out. Then there was a theatrical press agent in many of the stories, and we thought he could be the continuing character. I wrote about three scripts, Emlyn Williams and Ring Lardner Jr. each wrote one, and Lillian Hellman, who had once been a press agent herself, was going to do one. It looked as though it could be pretty good. And then the edict came down from above: everything we were doing was far too genteel and placid, and no one seemed to be hitting anyone. Jim Aubrey called me in and said, 'Look, kiddo, you can put those shows you're doing in the second or third season, but you've got to do a more active, physical

show now or you won't have a second season...' I was pretty much out of it after that, and each programme was filled with guns and people socking other people and automobile chases. The series went on for the season and then it was cancelled. But I did direct the pilot, called *An Eye on Emily*, and I thought it was damn good. It was shot on location in and around New York, and Tuesday Weld played the lead and was really remarkable.

Television really doesn't interest me—at least not the commercial side of it. And it upsets me that so many people are looking at so many films on so many television screens. To me, it's like seeing a movie through the wrong end of a telescope: the design of a picture for the cinema screen is quite different from that. Or take an actor like Spencer Tracy. He was that dream film actor, because he never seemed to be doing anything. He didn't act for the camera; he pretty much was it. He was always thinking and feeling something, and the camera captured that feeling and transmitted it to us. But on a little television screen, you miss so much of that—you just can't see it. And when you look at Garbo... her face when we saw it in something like *Flesh and the Devil* would just about take the top of your head off. But you don't get her on the television screen, do you? The magic just won't take all that hammering and handling and reducing.

Seeing films on television means that we are losing what Thornton Wilder called the 'shoulder to shoulder' experience: the fact that you go into a great hall with a thousand strangers and something happens on the screen and you all laugh together. That's something worth having; and you miss it when you look at a film by yourself. On this question of laughter... I laugh very frequently while I'm writing, because I didn't know I was going to say that. Something runs down your sleeve out of your unconscious and surprises the hell out of you. And obviously there is no real laughter that is occasioned by anything except surprise...

I think there will come a time, I hope it's not too far distant, when the screen will have a literature of its own; when they will stop leaning on novels and plays and old television shows as sources of movies. You can make movies out of the dreams that are movies themselves. And that's what the screen should principally be used for: Movies. We're set back again now with *The Godfather*—an enormous success which came from a popular novel, so that for a couple of years they'll be buying up all the gangster stories and Mafia stories. But I'm not thinking of next year or the year after. I'm thinking of what is likely to happen with the whole medium as it develops. We now have something like 90,000 students in film courses in the American universities. All of them won't find employment in the film business—they'll go into television and industrial films and cassettes and commercials, and some of them will leave it altogether. But I think that eventually we shall develop a breed of film-maker who will understand film and what can be done with it. And then, I think we'll really begin to see some movies, and not just exploitable hunks of show business. ■

# IN THE PICTURE

## Safety Zone

An hour with Angela Lansbury is a series of tantalising fragments from a private person remembering public moments: a vanished Hollywood, a gallery of splendid performances. We talk about the shape of some of those performances and the elusive quality of talent. She reflects, then says quietly, 'I don't think of myself as having any particular style. I choose to call it concentration. It's a loose word to use, but not to experience. I suppose it's tied up with economy. One tends to burble along in conversation. That's why I don't talk much about what I do because I find it dissipates, in a sense.'

Gently urged, she does talk. 'I believe in finding the character through the words themselves. You're as good as what's on the printed page. I can sense right away from the dialogue whether the author really understands the lady he's writing about. If I feel it's true, then I sense that there's room for me to bring something to it, as well as just saying the words and getting across what he wrote. That's the difference between an exciting part and an ordinary one. I don't think I've ever played a run of the mill role, except in *Remains to be Seen*. Most of the time they haven't been very large parts, but some of them seem to strike a bell with people. When that happens, they never seem to forget. Ever.'

She rang that bell with her first film appearance at 18 in *Gaslight* (*Murder in Thornton Square*) as the saucy Cockney maid, Nancy, though she'd gone to MGM to audition for *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. As it turned out, she got both parts because Louis B. Mayer signed her up for seven years after seeing her *Gaslight* test. 'I think he looked on me as a rather interesting piece of horseflesh; that's the only way I can describe it. He was interested in breeding blood strains, and he applied the same

sort of terminology to actors as to fillies. His talent lay in picking winners from both. And he liked the idea of having the whole stable under his wing. At one time he wanted to put the whole family under contract. He did it with my mother (Moyna MacGill) but we wouldn't let him do it to my brothers, who eventually did very well on their own anyway.'

Under George Cukor's direction, *Gaslight* was a happy initiation. 'There's no question that he was the most understanding, humorous, delightful man you could possibly imagine. He had the patience of a saint. He was in no hurry and his only interest was in getting the scene right.'

*Dorian Gray* was a total contrast: a sympathetic character before the cameras and a spooky experience on the set. 'Oscar Wilde left so much unsaid. He implied the murkiest, the most god-awful depths in this man's life, and yet I didn't know what they were. I've not even thought about it since particularly. But we were stuck for weeks on those East End sequences around the docks, and the place where I sang 'Little Yellow Bird', and I remember sensing the most incredible evil. It was as if Albert Lewin, the director, and Gordon Wiles, his assistant and production designer, had created more than just sets. I felt they knew what it was all about, but I wasn't about to ask—and they weren't about to tell me. It really comes across in the film, I think.'

She made thirteen movies under her seven-year MGM contract, one of them on loan-out to Paramount for DeMille's *Samson and Delilah*. Halfway through the story she was skewered with a javelin for her troubles. 'To this day, people ask me if that spear hurt... DeMille loved all the colour and the trappings and the characters who took attitudes. They were vessels to be filled. In a sense, it was all mechanical. He cast you by

your feet, not your profile: if you had good feet, you were in. He insisted that everyone wore sandals. You weren't told in so many words, but Edith Head, the costume designer, explained that I'd have to walk around barefoot in his office one day. I wasn't to feel badly about it; he just liked to be sure. He'd take a quick look as you walked by and give her a nod if all was well.'

There were quite a few roles that she didn't want to play, including *If Winter Comes*. 'That was a great disappointment. I wanted to play the role Janet Leigh did, and I thought that's what I was going to play. Then, suddenly, I had the wife thrown at me. Similarly with *The Three Musketeers*: I wanted the part of Milady de Winter, but that went to Lana Turner and I was asked to do Queen Anne. I refused at first and almost went on suspension for it. Some of the films I did at MGM (between the good ones, if you know what I mean) were made quickly by directors whose interest was story, action and visuals. They weren't interested in character.'

What does she want from a director? 'Much too much, probably. I don't want to be left on my own. I really look for a great deal of help from a director, and I'm disappointed when I don't get it. I've lived through several pictures where I've been thrown on my own resources or instincts by a director who's delighted and thrilled because he hasn't had to do anything about the performance.'

Martin Ritt, on *The Long Hot Summer*, was one of the exceptions ('He has a marvellous kind of vocabulary for actors'). Another was Peter Hall, who directed her London stage debut earlier this year in Edward Albee's *All Over*. 'He spent days with us examining

and discussing every phase of our individual roles and the interplay that could develop. As an ensemble piece it was fascinating to play and, I believe, to watch, whether you liked the subject matter or not.'

'Frankenheimer worked the same way with us on *All Fall Down*. We rehearsed for two weeks on the sets, which has very seldom happened to me in films. One thinks of John as an action director, but he was much more than that. He attempted to get under the skin of the characters, and he got some fascinating performances out of all of us. Annabel was a very difficult part for me, and I give high credit to John for that performance. In the book she had almost bohemian overtones... all sorts of character facets which we really didn't get time to explore in the picture.'

A distinctive Lansbury trait in virtually all her performances is an astonishing self-control, which she can colour equally well with pathos or menace or comedy. 'I've had it all my life. It's just a part of me. Sometimes I think it gets in my way and I have to push it aside, this thing of always maintaining a margin for error and working in a safety zone.' A valuable quality, perhaps? 'I don't know. Does it make for really exciting theatre or extraordinary acting on occasion? I have to find out. I don't think I've yet hit my zenith.'

Does she look at her own performances? 'I'll see the rough cut and perhaps the final result, but I've never been a great one for watching rushes. I find them rather disconcerting and they can have a constricting effect on me. I start to think about whether a movement or an angle is right or not. You know, some actors are very quick to catch on to where their key light should be, but I didn't become aware of myself in

Angela Lansbury in 'Black Flowers for the Bride'





News camera at Astapovo: Tolstoy's wife at the window of the stationmaster's hut

relation to the camera until the early 1960s. I began to understand that I shouldn't be photographed with directional lighting. The more light you throw on me, the better. I'd been spoiled by people like Harry Stradling and Joe Ruttenberg, who would never let a scene go by without me looking as good as possible. But I would hesitate to say to a cameraman "That's a bad angle for me," because it's sometimes more telling to look slightly ravaged if a scene demands it. That worked in *The Manchurian Candidate* where we had Lionel Lindon, who was a very fast cameraman and not too interested in sculpturing faces with light.'

Sadly, one learns that she won't recreate her stage *Mame* on film. Drury Lane audiences didn't see her because it would have meant at least another year added to her two-and-a-half-year marathon in New York. 'I also hesitated because I would have become a musical comedy star here. I don't think the English audience would ever have accepted me in a straight play after that. I'm very torn between legitimate and musical theatre. I haven't the voice for opera, but I'd like to do a really fascinating play with a character who not only sings, but is also a piece of whole cloth in the acting department. That's what I'm really hoping to find one of these days, because I think the combination of music and drama is the closest the theatre can get to the impact of a movie... I think three months is the longest an actor can keep up energy and interest in a straight part, and that's why *All Over* suited me ideally as a short term engagement. It was a lovely way to come to Britain, although I didn't know how the British critics would receive me.'

Soberly? 'Very. I think it's the only way to be received here, quite honestly. If I'd wanted it any other

way, I'd have waited and come in with some noisy solo thing. But I wanted to come in very carefully and not bang the door...'

'I remember Hollywood in its heyday; I came in at the end of a very lush period. It was a small, removed place, but everybody went there. Now it's non-existent as I remember it and we'll never get it again. But I hope we don't lose our movie houses. I think it's terribly important to put on your coat and go to a place to see a piece of entertainment. To me, the greatest luxury is to go to the movies in the afternoon. I feel it's the wickedest thing, and I adore doing it. I come out and it's still light. It takes me back to when I was nine and could go to the pictures by myself. I'd pay eightpence to see Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire, sit through it all until I came out with a splitting headache, then go home and throw up from eating too many chocolates.'

TED GILLING

## The Last Days of Tolstoy

The television fashion for a kind of collage programme, mixing newly shot documentary material with historical footage, is really opening up the archives. Jonathan Stedall's recent BBC programme *Tolstoy—from Riches to Rags* turned out to be a real eye-opener from this point of view. Tolstoy in his garden, walking along country roads, arriving and departing from crowded Moscow stations—some of these shots have turned up in other compilations. But the final sequence has never before been seen in the West, and included two or three shots which for sheer dramatic poignancy could scarcely be matched in a fiction feature.

In November 1910, in flight from his wife and home, Tolstoy

was struck down with pneumonia when he arrived at Astapovo, a remote country railway station, where the stationmaster's house became his sick room. In a long-held, deep-focus shot, we see Sonia, his wife, leaving the train and walking with several friends up the platform to camera. Next, we see her arriving at the hut and, after a moment's hesitation, peering in at the window. An official rebuffs her, and she walks disconsolately away. She was not to see her husband again until his dying moment a few days later. Almost equally remarkable are the shots of Tolstoy's funeral at Yasnaya Polyana—high angle views of the procession with its swirling crowds and the sea of wreaths around the coffin.

Clearly, some fairly lively and resourceful film minds were involved here. But who, precisely, shot it all? Tolstoy became headline news in his final years, and his movements were followed by cameramen of several nations—including, possibly, the French Pathé team, who had a fine reputation for being in the right place at the right time. Mr. Stedall, during his researches in Russia with the Novosti Press Agency, was given access, through the Russian film archive, to a 50-minute silent documentary on Tolstoy from which he extracted most of his startling film clips. It has not been possible to trace a producer or any credits on this film, but it seems likely that much of the footage must have been the work of Alexander Drankov, the pioneer Russian producer/cameraman. Jay Leyda recorded in his article 'Tolstoy on Film' (*SIGHT AND SOUND*, 1954) that Drankov was virtually responsible for overcoming the great man's distrust of the 'cinematograph'. He had an ally in Tolstoy's publicity-conscious wife, and showed a good deal of ingenuity in following his subject

around, filming where he could. He even enlisted Tolstoy's advice about filming a village wedding; and then publicised the picture as having been directed by Tolstoy himself.

Leyda's article mentions neither the Astapovo nor the funeral shots. Whether Drankov or someone else was behind the camera on the railway station, the extraordinary clarity and immediacy of the shots is not easy to explain. Did the cameraman just wait around until Sonia arrived and then film what he saw? Or did he persuade her to restage the arrival and the scene around the hut? The set-ups are so well planned and framed as to suggest at least some degree of preparation, and perhaps the presence of more than one operator. In another sequence Tolstoy, frail and bent, walks past the camera, which is turned on its tripod to look after him as he walks away; an effect of marvellous finality. It seems ironic that the medium which he initially regarded as so cheap and degrading has now recaptured a dimly remembered historical event as a live experience, sixty years later.

JOHN GILLET

## Another Country...

The death of John Grierson earlier this year was in part an underlining of how much the film production situation in Scotland has changed over the last five years—or more precisely, how much attitudes towards the perennial problems of finance and distribution have changed with the arrival of a new generation of Scottish film-makers, people who choose to work in Scotland despite all the difficulties, rather than head south.

In 1961, the Films of Scotland production about the Clyde shipyards, *Seawards the Great Ships* (for which Grierson wrote the original treatment), won an Academy Award in the 'Best Documentary' category. The retrospective irony of the Oscar extends beyond the eventual fate of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders to reach the role that Films of Scotland plays in Scottish film production. Organised in its present form in 1955 (with moral but not financial support from the then Government), Films of Scotland acts as a self-financing midwife to native production, finding sponsors, contracting subjects to the various film companies in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and organising distribution. The Oscar set the seal on six years' effort and seemed the best of omens for the future. Yet, if there is one attitude that unites the new generation, it is their dissatisfaction that there is still in Scotland just one major route into the market, and a route which is still the low-budget (around £7,000) sponsored documentary one. Hence the persistence in the last year or so of the question 'What about feature films?'

Some feasible answers are beginning to emerge. One of them, the most widely trumpeted one,

seems a non-starter. Although the national press has taken every so often to acclaiming the first signs of a film industry proper, this particular red herring inevitably takes the form of lengthy visits by English units doing location work in the Western Highlands and Islands. Though barely reported at the time, Stanley Kubrick's second unit may well have been the first wave, using sea lochs on the Western coast to double (suitably doctored, of course) for the surface of Jupiter in 2001. More recently and publicly, *When Eight Bells Toll*, *To Catch a Spy* and *Madame Sin* have given local journalists the chance to get excited about the prospect of Pinewood, Oban-style. But to predict a Scottish film industry on the basis of these visits is rather like hailing *Get Carter* as the birth of a Newcastle film industry.

The ambitions of local filmmakers seem at the moment to constitute a more promising sign. Laurence Henson and Eddie McConnell of International Film Associates have completed a half-hour feature for Films of Scotland, *The Duna Bull* (Films of Scotland's first such venture); Robin Crichton keeps busy with features shot for foreign television—last year, there was a £70,000 venture about the Marie Celeste, shot in *Cul-de-Sac* country; Charlie Gormley, whose European experience in scripting and directing has convinced him of the viability of feature production in the Scottish economic context, has formed Tree Films with cameraman David Lewis and editor Bill Forsyth, with an eye to making modestly budgeted thrillers rooted (not just set) in Scottish society. But the most substantial achievement in terms of actual films is that of Michael Alexander and Mark Littlewood.

Their collaboration works along the lines of Alexander as writer/director and Littlewood as cameraman, although these distinctions inevitably become somewhat blurred in the working process. Their films to date fall neatly into three groups—the sponsored category, the subjective documentaries (such as *Friday*, *Saturday*, *Sunday*, *Monday*, about young people on a holiday weekend, and *Fine Thanks, Who Are You?*, a look at Edinburgh during the Festival) and the 'short story' films.

Interesting as the first two groups are, it is the latter films—*The Bodyguard*, *The Family*, *The Poet*, *The All-Rounder* and *The Gardener*—that seem most revealing. Alexander's own family live on the Isle of Arran, and nearly all his films are shot there, often using relatives as actors. Yet these are never in any sense 'home movies', because of the strongly defined sensibility through which the stories are filtered. At the centre of each film is the acting-out of an obsessive solipsism. The bodyguard protects his young master by cradling him as the latter drives his car, testing the food and drink at a party, searching his friends for weapons, curling up watchfully at the foot of his bed, so that

master and servant become one, each a *doppelgänger* to the other. The pretentious poet and his fanatical interviewer talk endlessly at one another, with never a word understood on either side. Most characteristic of all is the all-rounder, the handyman who grinds his teeth as he compulsively turns the simplest of household jobs into feats of daring and endurance. The setting is relevant here, for Alexander's use of island landscapes and cold northern light (often reminiscent of the island where Bergman's characters act out their obsessions) emphasises the isolation of these manic figures at their self-imposed tasks.

Basically, these films are ironic comedies, but the humour is tempered by a firmly controlled use of shifts from various levels of reality to those of fantasy. *The Family* is the clearest example, counterpointing the actual experience of a young man meeting his girl friend's family for the first time with the angry fantasies that crowd into his head each time he vainly tries to be alone with the girl. Here, too, Bergman comes to mind in one superb shot of the family—seemingly numbering about two dozen—as they appear at every door and window of the house. But if *The Family* signals its base in reality, the other films are less easily read. *The Bodyguard* is on one level a hilariously logical extension of the behaviour patterns of anxious parents, but the spectator cannot be sure if he is watching a detached examination of an obsession, or an obsessed view of what lies beneath recognisable relationships.

None of these films cost very much; *The Bodyguard*, which came first, was made for just under £100. But the way in which the other films were financed is perhaps a pointer to the future. All of them were

given screenings by BBC Scotland, who also commissioned the Edinburgh Festival documentary, and this—plus help from the BFI Production Board for *The Family*—enables Alexander to keep working on these personal projects. At the moment he is scripting a fifty-minute film dealing with a boy's translation from secondary school to university, again with the encouragement of the Production Board. But the BBC connection seems a fruitful one. Although the day when it emulates, for example, RAI in Italy is probably far off, the prospect is clearly an inviting one, since the real need is for a rationalisation of access to finance and distribution. In the next few years, it could well be happening here.

JOHN LINDSAY BROWN

## Bergamo in Exile

The Bergamo Festival is something of an anomaly. For the past two years, in an effort to avoid the *contestatori* whose pressures threatened to turn it into a political festival along Pesaro lines, it has been exiled to San Remo, a resort town whose few inhabitants seemed more concerned with international tourism and national elections than international culture. The audience for this year's Festival (the 15th) consisted mostly of visiting journalists and participating film-makers, though a flurry of local interest was evidenced by the arrival on the last night of a small group of left-wing hecklers, who turned out to greet the right-wing minister invited to distribute the prizes.

Not that politics were absent from the screen. (Perhaps it was the shock of finding them there that so distressed the projectionist, who had trouble not only in deciding on the right ratios, but even on one

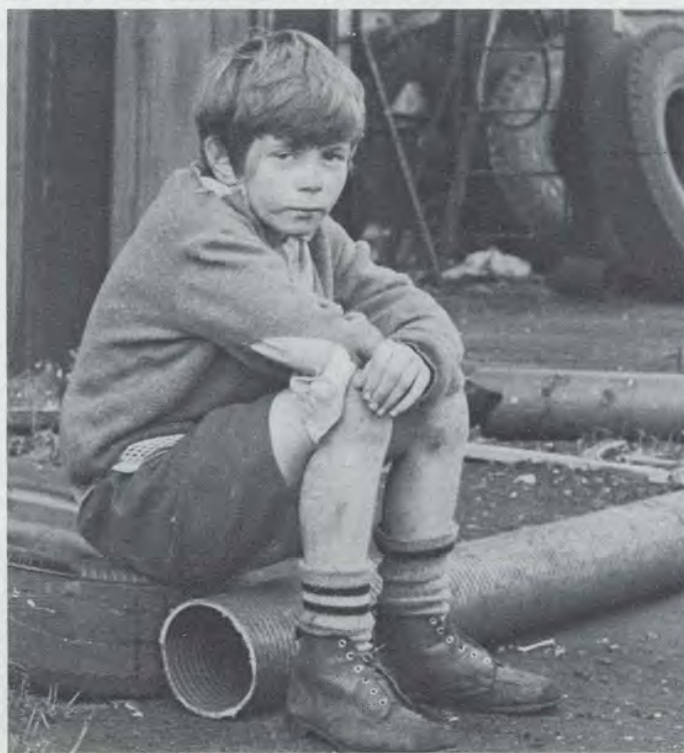
occasion in committing himself to the appropriate lens.) 16 mm. agit-prop and pop clarion calls to revolution were very much the order of the day. It seemed hard to justify the official label of a Festival of *Auteur* Films when so frequently confronted by the evidence that clichés know no frontiers.

The spectacle of well-to-do young men, rejecting the materialism of their societies and running in expensive fur or leather coats through city streets or country pastures became an almost daily occurrence: laced with incest and the shades of Arrabal's abattoir for Giulio Questi's quasi-mystical *Arcana*; overshadowed by Teutonic gloom in the ironically titled *Without Indulgence* by Theodor Kotulla, a distinguished German critic whose own film seemed a prize example of the political thumb-twiddling it was so lethargically denouncing; or lyrically mindless in Thomas Kragh's *The Deserter*, a near faithful transposition of *Easy Rider* to Denmark, with a young man abandoning the Army, taking to the road and dallying in commune and dope den before being shot by a band of 'innocent' children.

It was only when the familiar leather-jacketed figure showed up in a Hungarian factory in Peter Bacso's *Breaking Out* that one really sat up and took notice. This was no tired transposition of the James Dean legend to a foreign setting, but an energetic and craftsmanlike study of some chinks in the 'Iron Curtain', a dynamic description of the conflicting pulls of East and West, freedom and technocracy, a courageous and not uncritical portrait of what it means to be a rebel in a country still bureaucratically consolidating its revolution. But this was Bacso's tenth film, and eventually the Grand Prize went to the only other film to provide its indigenous hero with a recognisable cause: *Pilvilinna* (*Castle of Dreams*), the first feature by twenty-six-year-old Sakari Rimmien, about a Maoist schoolboy in Finland who brings his school out on strike and is sent to prison for disturbing the peace, only to be told by a warder that 'we have no political prisoners here'. Shot in black and white, the film is as modest as its hero's cause, yet it is made with unusual technical assurance and a certain wry humour (a commodity in which the Festival was exceptionally low). The alien adult characters are precisely observed (particularly the schoolmistresses, nervously twitching behind their authoritarian smiles), while instead of the usual line in lyric ecstasy, the film also had the distinction of being the only one in the Festival to observe all the awkward fumbling and groping of adolescent sexual encounters.

But not all the films were about student protest, though the ones that weren't tended to get overlooked in the general rush to find a theme for the Festival. I particularly enjoyed Jørgen Leth's *Life in Denmark*, a long short film in which he imposes reading-primer

Bill Douglas's 'My Childhood': Stephen Archibald as Jamie



titles on a succession of brief *cinéma-vérité* interviews and candid camera shots, producing in the process both an alarmingly sardonic picture of his native land and a Godardian investigation into the nature of images; Shohei Imamura's *Story of Post-War Japan as Told by a Bar Girl*, an unusually frank interview with a promiscuous lady who has lived since the war off and with American servicemen, intercut with newsreel footage of political events that parallel her own drive towards the new imperialist motherland; and *Tahya Ya Didou*, the first independent Algerian feature, made by Mohamed Zinet, Pontecorvo's assistant on *Battle of Algiers*.

Beginning with a French tourist's eye view of the liberated capital, Zinet shows up, with what one can only describe as a chirpy pessimism, the conflicting traditions that have served to undermine his people's identity: the desert horsemen, the poetry of the Casbah, the legacy of the OAS, the new bureaucracy. The yashmak and the mini-skirt, the donkey-cart and the Cadillac jostle side by side; and the philosophical shrug with which French atrocities are recollected seems the more astonishing when one learns that Zinet's entire family was tortured and killed in the War of Independence.

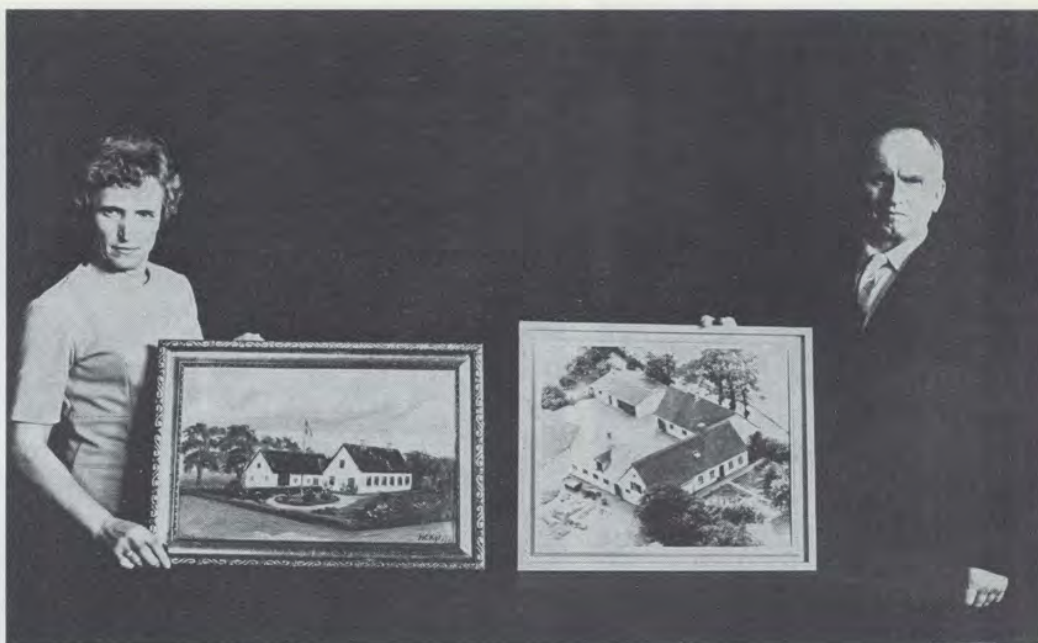
Finally, there is Truffaut's *Anne and Muriel* (reviewed elsewhere in this issue). He may have set out to tell a sad and oppressive tale, and in his own terms he has succeeded. But the relish with which he tells it (the humorous ellipses, the thundering melodramatic effects) is still as contagiously joyful as it ever was in *Jules and Jim*.

JAN DAWSON

## New Directions

The British Film Institute Film Production Board has recently announced backing for a new feature production, *Comrade Jacob*, to be made by Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo from David Caute's novel about the 17th century revolutionary sect the Diggers. Since the Herculean labour of *It Happened Here*, Brownlow and Mollo have made little headway in an industry not given to supporting iconoclasts. Caute has given them the *Comrade Jacob* rights for next to nothing.

The Production Board's decision to support a director with a feature film and television documentaries already behind him marks a significant change of policy. Previously, the Board has been largely concerned to encourage untried talent, which has generally meant aspiring film-makers cutting their teeth on shorts. Now the aim is to promote features as well, and not necessarily from tyro directors. The only proviso for film-makers with experience in the industry is that before applying to the Board they should first have exhausted all possible sources of finance within the industry. The *Comrade Jacob* project, which is also being financed by the Vivien Leigh



Jørgen Leth's 'Life in Denmark'

Memorial Fund, falls into this category.

This policy change happens to coincide, more or less, with the appointment of a new production officer to the Board, Mamoun Hassan, who points out that the policy has been shaped by events as much as by any conscious decision to change course. The palmy days when the Board, as the Experimental Film Fund, gave a start to film-makers whose shorts stamped their passports to the industry have long since passed. The big distributors, especially with their new conglomerate status, are no longer interested in short films, unless they happen to fit a programme slot; and potential film-makers are beginning to realise, if they haven't already learned the hard way, that shorts are not the road towards feature production they may once have seemed.

The result is that while the Board still receives projects for short films, an increasing number of applicants for grants are submitting feature-length ideas. And some of these applications are coming from people with films or television work already behind them—film-makers uncomfortably aware of the replacement of flexible outlets in television with short-term contracts, or encouraged by the example of low-budget feature productions like Barry Salt's *Permutations* or Mike Leigh's *Bleak Moments*. The other side of this coin, of course, is that embryo directors applying to the Board are now in competition with experienced film-makers.

Mamoun Hassan doesn't think that this new tendency conflicts with the Board's established reputation for providing opportunities for apprentice directors. The Board is now backing fewer films than previously, but it would be pointless, he thinks, to shape ideas to a set budget simply in order to get more films off the ground. 'In the first place, twelve films with a £1,000 budget don't exist, and

secondly to force people into a particular style is a kind of tyranny.' Instead, he is trying to encourage projects whose budget and length, within the limitations of the Board's current resources, will be determined by their needs. The only condition is that ideas for films should reveal some kind of originality; the Board is interested in experimental films, for instance, but 'not just take two of American experimental cinema.' Current projects include a version of John Berger's *Fortunate Man* (of which Berger provided the rights *gratis*); a script by Howard Brenton involving anarchists, a kidnapped VIP, a film-maker and the police, which Tony Bicat will direct; and films by total beginners.

A fair example of the Board's policy in practice is *My Childhood*. This film, the first of a projected trilogy, is 47 minutes long and was made by Bill Douglas, a London Film School graduate. At rough cut stage (the film will be premiered later this year at the National Film Theatre) it emerges as an imaginative and original work, owing nothing to anyone. Much more than a kind of animated photograph album of images from childhood, this partly autobiographical film, set in a Scottish mining village at the end of the war, delves into the mind of a child as it might be recalled in adult memory. The camera fixes on childhood experiences—friendship with a German prisoner-of-war, a pet canary devoured by a cat, an old woman found dead in her chair—which are at once random recollections and indelibly ingrained memories of a time when every event was important until tomorrow.

What emerges, in the film's deceptively simple style, is a vivid and curiously, even uncomfortably, familiar evocation of childhood. Familiar because these images, while obviously retaining their specific reference and resonance, invite comparison from one's own

childhood memories. It's an authentic and oddly lingering record of the moral neutrality of childhood, and all those times when emotion was inseparable from circumstance.

DAVID WILSON

## Cinema Rising

One bright spot in an otherwise dreary April was the launching of *Cinema Rising*, England's first film newspaper. Not just a novel sales gimmick, the format reflects a spirited attempt to bridge the gaps between the critical glossies, the film fan photo-spreads, and the bald and generally inaccessible facts about films in production that get tucked away in the back pages of the trade papers. The paper contains both reviews and interviews (there's a particularly fine one with Truffaut in the second issue), though the bias is towards fact rather than opinion, and the emphasis is anything but parochial. The May number contains reports from the Cannes, Yale and Toulon Festivals, as well as newsletters from Paris, New York, Los Angeles and Amsterdam; while in the review section, available underground films are discussed alongside the latest circuit releases. The choice of cover photos so far (Joe D'Alessandro for April, Alfred Hitchcock for May) reflects an agreeably non-sectarian approach.

Recent surveys have shown that most regular moviegoers are in the 17-27 age group, and Tony Rayns, the paper's 23-year-old editor, is trying to provide that audience with all the information it needs in a voice it will recognise as its own. The 15,000 print order for the second issue has apparently sold out, and at a modest 15p a month the paper is good value for any age group. However, like all new ventures, it could do with more financial support. Potential subscribers, backers and philanthropists should write to Cinema Rising Ltd., 12/13 Little Newport Street, London, W.C.2.



Above: 'Les Deux Anglaises': two faces of Muriel (Stacey Tendeter). Below: Michel Bouquet, Catherine Deneuve in 'La Sirène du Mississippi'

# TRUFFAUT: the educated heart

Julian Jebb

The desirable and beautiful women who inhabit Truffaut's films, from Jeanne Moreau in *Jules et Jim* to Catherine Deneuve in *La Sirène du Mississippi*, share an intense and often uncomplicated responsiveness to life. The most glamorous, and because of her generosity in a way the most attractive, is Delphine Seyrig in *Baisers Volés*. It is she, Chanel suited, elegantly coiffured, standing against the window in a tiny Parisian room, who addresses Antoine Doinel, shivering with wonder and love in bed. 'Les gens sont formidables,' she says. Her father had told her this, and she passes it on to her young lover with the gaiety and conviction of true maturity. François Truffaut's films are a testament to this belief.

It is entirely characteristic of Truffaut that he should give this line to a woman who could so easily be dismissed by almost any other director as a frivolous or patronising

event in a young man's sentimental education. But Truffaut is incapable of categorisation: the beauty and oddness of human behaviour comes in any guise, and

once seen is investigated with a tender and intoxicated thoroughness. There are examples of this generosity of attention in all his work: in *La Mariée était en Noir*, the victims of Jeanne Moreau's jealous vendetta against her husband's murderers come each one vividly and idiosyncratically alive; in *Jules et Jim* there is the chatterbox Thérèse, smoking her cigarette backwards and shrieking with giggles, on one level a careful parody of the more desirable, more complicated Catherine (Jeanne Moreau), but also a touching and wonderfully funny character in her own right. In *La Peau Douce* Michael, the bore who separates the lovers in Rheims, is not merely a comic intrusion or a device for demonstrating the hero's weakness, but the very figure of the eager, disappointed, provincial man. As the lovers eventually sweep off to their reconciliation, we see him standing, suitcase in hand, on the doorstep of a hotel: we miss him. He, like everyone else, is formidable.

This loving and crowded richness of characterisation reaches its apogee in *Baisers Volés*, where everyone, from the cashier at the shoe shop to the entire staff of the detective agency, from Christine's parents to the mysterious stranger who declares his love in the final sequence, is treated by Truffaut with an ecstatic respect. As spectators, we are not invited to speculate about them outside the context of their relationship to Antoine—yet they are so vividly present that we will never forget them. They stand like giants, immersed in film.

In a television film made by Gavin Millar for the BBC's 'Review' last year, Truffaut disclaimed any conscious tenderness in his work. He makes, he says, films of feeling, not of ideas—but then, when talking about *L'Enfant Sauvage* and Dr. Itard, who tames the animal child into the beginnings of civilised behaviour, he speaks with passion about the exalting nature of human society, in which the category of bourgeois is irrelevant when set against the 'encouraging, marvellous and beautiful' fact that the wild boy has entered the society of man. Truffaut is not only on the side of



life, but on the side of human society, where the ecstasy of nature may be assumed into the world of ideas.

It is the synthesis of feeling and ideas which makes *La Sirène du Mississippi* not only a masterpiece but also a turning point in Truffaut's career. Made immediately after *Baisers Volés* and before *L'Enfant Sauvage* and *Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent*, it is nearer in tone to the later films and drastically different from the immediately preceding one.

Louis Mahé (Jean-Paul Belmondo), a tobacco planter living on the Indian Ocean island of Réunion, advertises for a wife. He goes to the boat to meet her, consulting the photograph which she has sent, a dark-haired 'spiritual' girl, not very beautiful. She is not there. Walking back from the harbour, he comes upon an apparition. Straw-hatted, in an Yves St. Laurent green chiffon dress and carrying a caged bird, stands Catherine Deneuve. She claims to be his fiancée. They drive to his estate. He is in love. They marry against a tumultuous colonial baroque altar; he insists that they share a bank account; we see Deneuve struggling with an unknown assailant in the streets of Réunion. She disappears with all his money, and the film begins.

There are only three other characters who are of even peripheral interest in *La Sirène*—a private detective, the 'real' fiancée's sister, and Belmondo's partner; and to none of these does Truffaut extend his familiar embracing sympathy. We are to concentrate on the classical love story: it is surely significant that this is the first film in which Truffaut engages the talents of two big stars, who bring with them all the associations of heroism. We think of them as Belmondo and Deneuve, as much as Mahé and Julie/Marion. But of course Truffaut brings out in them more surprising elements.

In one sense Julie/Marion is a regular Deneuve part. She is mysterious, a blank on which the audience may scribble its fantasies, as we have been encouraged to do before by Polanski in *Repulsion* and in her Buñuel films, *Belle de Jour* and *Tristana*. But Truffaut harbours a finer vision of her romance. Under his direction she explains her origins, pacing a hotel room; she adapts to the pursuit of her lover while peeling an orange during a sleepless night; she follows or leads in *association* with Belmondo. So Belmondo, too, is transfigured from the man who gets everything to the man who needs someone. The chase from the remote island, through southern French cities and eventually to the same chalet where Charlie in *Tirez sur le Pianiste* comes to his end, is charged with fantasy and obsession.

The dream elements are stressed throughout. There is the inconsequent luxury in which the lovers live while apparently penniless and on the run. There is the 'unreality' of tropical Réunion, where the film begins, acid greens under thunderous skies, to the snowscape romance over which Belmondo and Deneuve totter at the end, she bedecked with black feathers at the neck, wrist and calf, to face no conceivable social destiny. As Truffaut said in his television interview: 'A film comes off for me when it seems like a fairy story.' The important word here is *seems*. Just as Truffaut used the

conventions of the thriller in *La Mariée était en Noir* to reveal character, so in *La Sirène du Mississippi* he uses the trappings of romance and fairy-tale to illuminate an analysis of sexual passion.

Significantly, Belmondo suffers no lasting physical deterioration throughout his pursuit of Deneuve, and I think we are to draw the conclusion from this that Truffaut does not think his obsession in the least degrading and that the rewards of love are infinitely greater than the disappointments and frustrations. In every sense, the world is well lost for love. Deneuve steals from him, runs away repeatedly and eventually tries to poison him—each example of her fecklessness or betrayal is cause for Belmondo to adjust his vision of her. He is educating himself in understanding and forgiveness: what started as infatuation is transformed into a subtle and determined emotional maturity.

The visual style of the film reflects the gravity of its central theme. There are two exceptionally long takes involving slow and complex camera movement, and both at moments when Belmondo is discovering an important new betrayal of Deneuve's. For the rest, it is the protagonists who move about inside steadily held shots. *La Sirène* is the first film of Truffaut's to call on the restraints and sobriety of the French classical dramatists. Although the film is dedicated to the greatest of humanist directors, Jean Renoir, it is the plays of Racine which it recalls.

The puzzle of *Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent* (*Anne and Muriel* in Britain) is to locate Truffaut's true intentions. He has written about it: 'The reasons for which a film-maker chooses one subject rather than another are often shrouded in mystery even to himself . . . *Les Deux Anglaises* will not be an erotic film, but a film about feelings . . . we intend to create, in pictures, a eulogy of life.'

The film is based on the second novel of Henri-Pierre Roché, the author of *Jules et Jim*, and in principle it is a variation on the situation in the earlier book. Claude (Jean-Pierre Léaud), a young Frenchman, goes to stay with a friend of his mother's in Wales. She has two daughters, Anne (Kika Markham) whom he has already met in Paris, and Muriel (Stacey Tendeter). When he arrives, Muriel is suffering from an affliction of the eyes. The miniature paradise of the cottage, the sea-shore, the affectionate mother, is soon established—as also is the liberal attitude shared by Claude and Anne, when we are invited to share their approval of a neighbour who is untroubled by the theft of his boat because he says the thief has more need of it than he. Meanwhile Anne is at pains to give Muriel the greatest possible build-up: *she* is the more intelligent and sensitive of the sisters. When she does turn up, Claude almost dutifully falls in love with her.

The central failure of the film, it seems to me, is the character of Muriel. Truffaut appears to extend his full sympathy to her nervous high-mindedness, to suggest that she is 'fine' in the Henry James sense, and yet she emerges as hysterical, priggish and filled with dreary self-absorption. All her actions are motivated by fear, and she has little physical charm to compensate for her

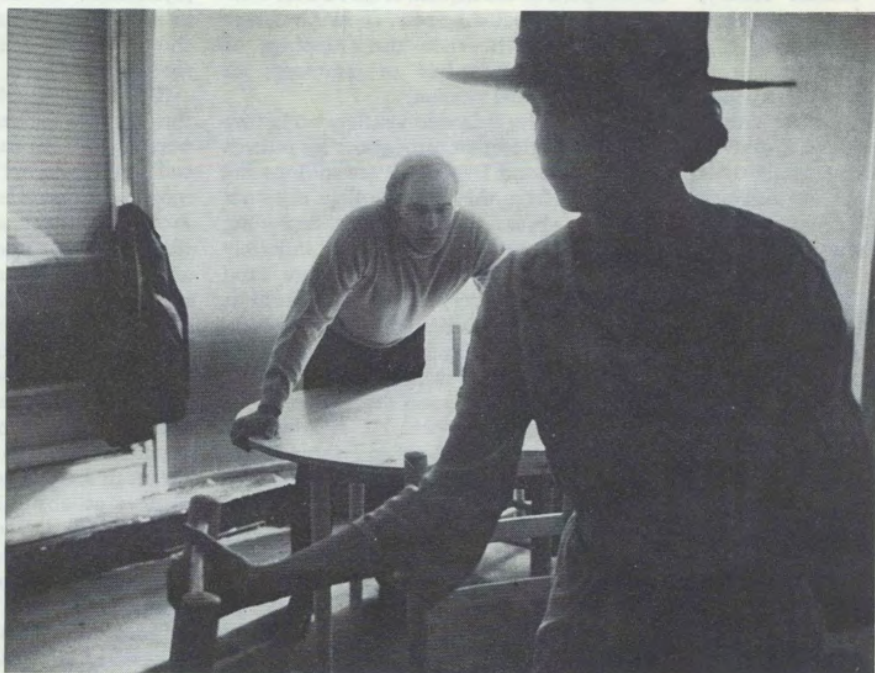
joylessness. It simply becomes impossible to believe that sensitive, sensible Claude should sustain a twenty-year-long passion for her.

There are references to the Brontës in the film, both verbal and visual—and a portrait of Keats hangs on Claude's bedroom wall; yet it is not of these writers one is most reminded. The film, rather, can be seen as a homage to the novel of feeling, to the fiction of, for example, Turgenev, Flaubert and E. M. Forster; and yet it perversely refuses to employ the bold strokes of drama and surprise which are one of the delights of the genre. Perhaps there is far more irony in Truffaut's attitude than appears on the surface, after one viewing. Perhaps the perpetual self-examination, trial separations, experimental domesticity, confessions are meant to seem simply old-fashioned: tender glances at absurdly outmoded behaviour. But there is a severity of visual treatment, a pervasive mutedness about the whole treatment of the story, which argues against any avowed ironic detachment.

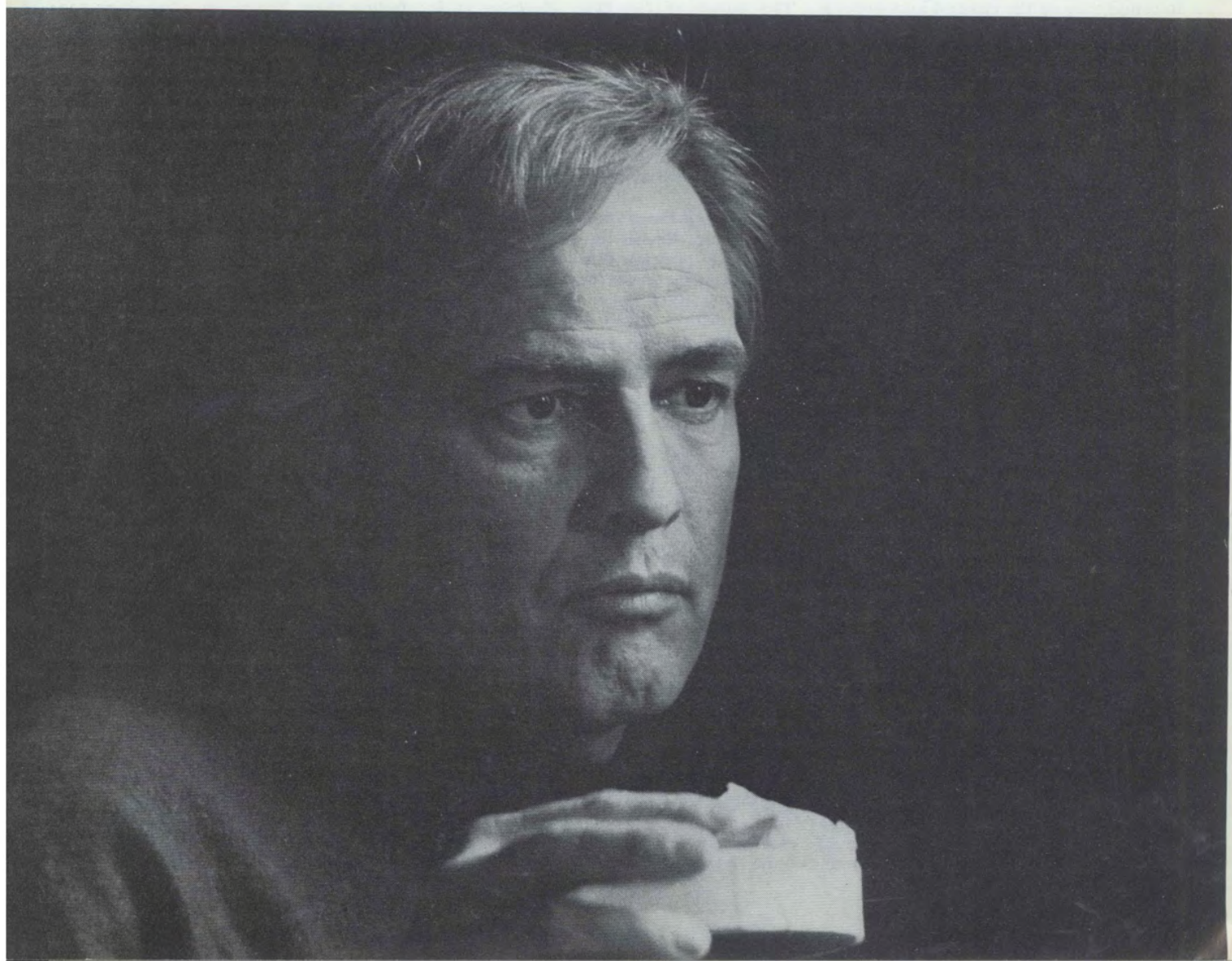
There are, of course, marvellous perceptions and truly beautiful moments. But there is little, if any, humour. When Claude has decided to renounce his intention to marry Muriel after a year's enforced separation, Anne appears radiantly in Paris. They have an affair at a mountain lake accompanied by words made familiar from *Jules et Jim*: 'Love doesn't complicate life—the uncertainty of love does,' and 'Live first—define it later.' Whether consciously or not, this is Forster country; beneath the surface of fine feeling there lingers an admonitory tone. There are moments when even the charming Anne, beautifully played by Kika Markham, reminds us of the Schlegel sisters in *Howard's End*; there is a note of moral stridency in the air which all the emotional refinement expressed by the characters cannot dissipate.

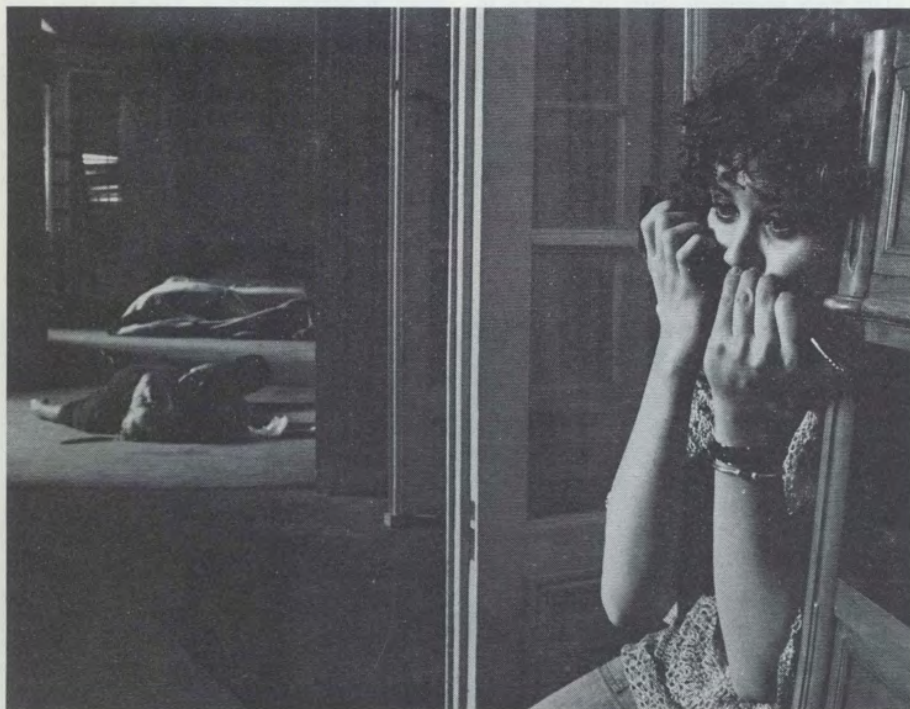
The film picks up dramatic pace when Anne decides to tell Muriel about her affair. Muriel is promptly and violently sick. Claude cannot face Muriel. Both the girls return to England; Anne, who believes in, and practises, free love, is pursued by a lover but dies of consumption saying, in an echo of Emily Brontë, that she has earth in her mouth. Muriel teaches Sunday school to children until, with little warning, she comes down the gangplank at Calais, spectacled and severely outfitted, to give herself for the first and last time to Claude. This scene is in fact very erotic, and the most explicit love scene in any of Truffaut's films—but it is violent and painful, ending with a shot of blood-saturated sheets. There is an epilogue set fifteen years later, in which we see Claude wandering in the Rodin gardens in Paris where he used to walk with Anne, in the vain hope that he will catch sight of Muriel's daughter. He catches sight of himself and remarks that he feels old.

It was Forster who wrote that the chief fault of the English public school man was an uneducated heart, a lack of responsiveness and maturity. Perhaps the uneasiness of the film stems from Truffaut's lack of understanding of just this quality in Muriel. The restrictions of the neurotic temperament seem to elude him, and so the triangular relationship on which the story is based fails to hold our sympathy. Truffaut, of all artists the one whose heart seems educated, cannot recognise his opposite. ■



# Last tango in Paris





Marlon Brando (left, and above left with Maria Schneider) and Maria Schneider (above) in 'Last Tango in Paris'.  
Photographs by Angelo Novi

The shooting of Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* should have begun last autumn. What with various difficulties over signing up Marlon Brando, the project dragged its way slowly through until Christmas; and shooting finally started in Paris during the first week of February. An international project if ever there was one, *Last Tango* is an Italo-French co-production, with Alfredo Grimaldi as producer and with United Artists putting up the cash. The director and cameraman are Italian; the star (Brando) American; and the co-stars (Maria Schneider, a newcomer, and Jean-Pierre Léaud) are French. Shooting ended on April 15th, and by the time this report appears the film will probably be completely finished.

There have been a number of changes in the project since it was first mooted, when I wrote about it in the Autumn 1971 *SIGHT AND SOUND*. The basic situation however remains unchanged—a kind of 'L'Amour Fou' story about a widower in his forties who tries to maintain a purely sexual relationship with a young girl who is about to be married. It has, of course, been fleshed out: Jean-Pierre Léaud, for instance, plays the girl's fiancé, a TV film director. In some of the first sequences to be filmed last February, we see him coming to the Gare St. Lazare to meet Jeanne (Maria Schneider). As she gets off the train, the couple is followed by a 16 mm. camera crew. She

tries to brush them away, only to learn that they are his crew, and that he has arranged the whole thing. Even his own life is to be grist to his mill.

At the time of shooting, Bertolucci had an idea of using the 16 mm. footage of the couple to punctuate the 'real' film. But we won't know until the final editing whether this is in fact the case: like many directors, he often doesn't use all his material. For instance, the girl is also met by two friends, twins, who are antique dealers and Women's Lib. proponents. At last hearing (mid-April), Bertolucci had decided to drop them from the film altogether. In this case, one wonders what will happen to the *L'Atalante* scene; for a sequence was filmed on a barge in the Canal St. Martin (not far from the original Hôtel du Nord), in which one of the girls was going to try to buy from Michel Simon some of the treasures of his barge cabin.

Only, as it turned out, it wasn't Michel Simon—he proved unavailable, or too expensive, or something. So Bertolucci, nothing daunted, decided to use Jean-Luc Bideau, the Swiss giant who became the toast of Paris in Alain Tanner's *The Salamander*, to play the role not of Simon but of a friend of Simon, who was selling the old man's treasures behind his back. If the antique-dealer girls go, how will Bideau be salvaged? Again, we will have to wait and see.

One can already see, however, that there are many echoes of older films in *Last Tango*, just as there were in *The Conformist*. The sequences at the Gare St. Lazare are not without some relation to *La Bête Humaine*, and the cabin of the *L'Atalante* barge is an almost exact copy of Vigo. In Bertolucci's case, this is no mere Cinémathèque-type coquetry. These quotations or homages are an integral part of his film, not just decoration. The structural anthropologists tell us that language has a mind of its own, and one which operates independently of any human individual. Bertolucci's films seem an example of the cinema itself operating independently of him: he is somehow plugged into the collective cinematic subconscious, and I think sees himself as heir to the whole heritage of the cinema's past fifty years.

This is why his films belong to that very special category which Jean-Marie Straub called 'film-film'; that is to say, films which are as much about the cinema as about their ostensible subjects. Other film-makers in this category are of course Max Ophüls, von Sternberg and Murnau—all directors noted for their passion for camera movements. Maybe a movie-movie is also characterised by its pleasure in pure movement.

Certainly, on the day of the Gare St. Lazare shooting, most of the time was spent in working out the complex camera movements. Not only did Bertolucci have his favourite cameraman, Vittorio Storaro (who also photographed *The Spider's Strategy* and *The Conformist*). He had imported from Italy his favourite pusher, one Mauro Marchetti, whom Bertolucci regards as the best, the smoothest pusher in the world. Not that he leaves the camera movement to Storaro and Marchetti. After he had discussed the shot with them, it was Bertolucci who got behind the Mitchell and went



At the Gare St. Lazare: Schneider, L aud and TV camera crew

through the complicated sequence of movements which allowed the camera to pick up the couple getting off the train and then retreated and advanced, pivoted and tilted, to get the whole sequence in one beautifully articulated movement.

The next day's shooting I attended was the *L'Atalante* scene. And even there, in the tiny cabin crowded with junk, Bertolucci had managed to set up some tracks. They couldn't have been any longer than three feet, but I'm willing to bet that the movement in the scene will be, if not vertiginous, then at least visible.

The last sequence that I watched being shot was in a flat over by the Hilton Hotel, a sixth floor apartment done up cleverly to serve not only as the empty flat in which Brando and Schneider pursue their tryst, but also as part of the hotel which Brando owns. Fortunately, there was a longish corridor on which most of the rooms gave, so we saw Maria coming through the door, walking about, looking it over, all the while humming 'Ten Cents a Dance'. Suddenly the telephone rings; and as she runs down the corridor to find the telephone

she is of course smoothly tracked by the camera, until the scene comes to a close with her hanging panic-stricken on to the dead line.

This use of the Rodgers and Hart song reminds me that the film's original version will be in a combination of French and English—and it will be mostly original sound. So we know what it will sound like; and the stills give us some idea of what it will look like. Bertolucci is determined that the colour should effectively reflect the true colour of Paris—grey, that is to say, with only little touches of brighter colour here and there.

Also, this will be the first film for some time in which Marlon Brando will have neither an accent nor make-up to hide behind, as it were. His astounding performance in *The Godfather* was a character part; here one awaits the incandescent power of his heroic Kazan roles. Plus, perhaps, that something more which a director like Bertolucci may be able to bring out.

## Richard Roud

Bertolucci and Brando





Broadcasting House and nationwide receivers in Stuart Legg's 'BBC: The Voice of Britain' (1935)



Elizabeth  
Sussex

## THE GOLDEN YEARS OF GRIERSON

John Grierson's death in February 1972 marked the end of something that could be said to have disintegrated at least twice before (in the late Thirties and again in the late Forties), and which in another sense lived on as long as he did. These excerpts from interviews with Grierson and some of the original members of his school of film-making\* are edited to try to evoke the atmosphere of the British Documentary Movement in the Thirties.

**Grierson:** I grew up in the Clydeside movement. I've been in politics all my life. Nobody who grew up in the Clydeside movement ever forgets. Under no circumstances do we forget. But whether I went into politics in the ordinary sense was another matter. I was offered a couple of constituencies before I left the university, and the thing that interested me—not that I'd have got in but I was offered the chance to stand for them—they were by two different parties. That tickles me, two different parties!

No, I thought I'd do a better political job the way I did, and I was very interested in this question of putting the working class on the screen, bringing the working class thing alive in another form than we were getting on the soapboxes of Glasgow Green. That wasn't good enough for me, the soapbox. You see, I worked in a factory down the Clyde and I didn't think that we could live off platforms, platform relationships. And I think I saw early the possibility of other forms. Of course I was interested in the journalistic form first of all, that is the yellow newspaper form. I've always been interested in that, the yellow newspaper. But then of course Flaherty was a turning point—*Nanook* hit Glasgow round about 1922, I think. I was on to it by 1924, that film could be turned into an instrument of the working class.

From then on there was no question of where one's duty lay. But it was an idea that didn't develop in Glasgow or in this country. It was an idea that developed in America. I spent three years, 1924 to 1927, based in Chicago, and I was very concerned then with what was happening to the immigrants. There was no question that it started out in a political conception, a political, social conception...

All we did in documentary was we occupied Oklahoma. I saw this thing. I saw here was a territory completely unoccupied. I thought I was going in for newspapers, but obviously newspapers were very expensive and I couldn't see myself buying up a few newspapers. But here were newspapers, as it were the whole power of newspapers, going for nothing. The only thing was to find the way of financing it. And of course the great event in the history of documentary was that we didn't go to Hollywood for money. We went to Governments for money and thereby tied documentary, the use of the realistic cinema, to purposes.

When Grierson returned to England in 1927, Stephen Tallents, Head of the Empire Marketing Board, had him appointed Films Officer. Walter Creighton was also engaged. After two years of converting Whitehall to the idea of making films, Grierson and Creighton were financed to make two experimental productions. Creighton made *One Family*, a seven reel fantasy about the gathering of the ingredients for the King's Christmas pudding, described by Sir Arthur Elton as 'very old-fashioned in our opinion, society ladies playing Britannia, and the Empire cake, Buckingham Palace and so forth' and described by Harry Watt as 'abysmally vomit-making'. Grierson made *Drifters*.

*Drifters* was given the then considerable honour of a screening at the Film Society. It was in the same programme as the first British showing of Eisenstein's *Potemkin*, which had previously been banned, even for private screenings, by the Conservative Government. Among those present were future

\*The extracts are taken from separate interviews given to Elizabeth Sussex for her book on the British Documentary Movement, to be published by November Books in Spring 1973. ©Elizabeth Sussex, 1972.

documentary film-makers like Basil Wright, Arthur Elton, Stuart Legg and Paul Rotha, who was to work for Grierson briefly in 1931 and then pursue an independent course as a director and producer, and the historian of the movement.

**Elton:** *Drifters* was an immense revelation to everybody who saw it at the time. Films were going through a particularly irritating, a particularly artificial phase. There were some magnificent American silent films, paying the penalty of the end of the good gangster silents, but the British film industry was fatuous, I think one can say. And *Drifters* was a revelation to us all—a revelation of Grierson's own theories that life at home is just as interesting as life in fiction if only you can be made to see it so. . .

**Wright:** Grierson had got the whole idea of Eisenstein's montage, not in the sense of just imitating a cutting technique but knowing what Eisenstein was about. . . I was terribly thrilled with *Drifters*. I said 'This is the sort of film I want to make.'

After the Film Society screening *Drifters* got wide cinema distribution, and as a result of its success, the EMB Film Unit was formed for continuous production. Apart from Granton Trawler, which he photographed on his own, Grierson never personally directed another film.

**Rotha:** The fact that Grierson himself made one film, the legendary *Drifters*, remarkable film as it is, and then turned producer, is a very important turning point in British documentary. In fact, there would have been no British documentary if Grierson hadn't done that. With great sacrifice, he gave up the idea of going on directing films himself and became a producer so that he could create a bunch of young people at the EMB and so forth. Grierson's influence as producer is very great indeed over all the EMB films, and all the GPO films up to the time he left the GPO. Of this I have no doubt whatsoever.

**Grierson:** I got £2,500 to make *Drifters*, and I think I got £7,500 for a picture called *Port of London*, and *Port of London* was merely used as an excuse to create the Unit. So we kept that running. £7,500 I think I had for the first year. Maybe I had it for the second year. I don't know how long, but there was always this mythical film that I kept on pretending was going to be made. We did a few shots. I may say we never wasted any of the shots because it turned out later that our shooting in the Port of London had become extremely valuable as background, you know when it came to background projection (i.e. for feature films). We were the people who provided the back shots of the docks and the stuff that went into the porthole. So that all came out of the famous *Port of London* illusion, the idea that I was making my second great epic. I was in fact creating the documentary film movement. It was done on that.

Grierson's first recruit was Basil Wright.

**Wright:** The first thing I had to do was to make what was called a poster film. Sir Stephen Tallents had the idea of putting up triptych poster frames all over England, beautifully made from Empire wood with room for three different posters in them. He was getting all the best artists of the day,



*Faces of Britain.* Arthur Elton's 'Aero-Engine' (1934) and (below) Harry Watt's 'Health in Industry' (1938)

McKnight Kauffer and all those people, to design things about the Empire and so on. . . Arising from this Grierson said to Tallents, 'All right, while you're doing your poster campaign why shouldn't we have poster films?' Everyone was very much influenced by the way the Russian directors were integrating their subtitles into the montage of their films, by intercutting them in short pieces, splitting up sentences, varying the type size from very small to very big and so on. So I was given some very rusting cans full of mostly very, very old instructional films about cocoa in the Gold Coast, Ghana as it is today, and Grierson said, 'O.K. Sell the British public the idea that cocoa comes from one of our great colonies, the Gold Coast, and do it in (I can't remember)

'Housing Problems' (Edgar Anstey and Arthur Elton, 1935) and (below) 'Children at School' (Basil Wright, 1937)



either five or seven minutes.

So there I was wrestling with this unknown material. It was the first time I'd ever touched 35 mm. film. Nobody told me what to do or how to do it. I had to find it all out for myself. And he said, 'I will give you five pounds for the whole job, and it's your responsibility to get the titles made.' He told me about somebody who could do titles, who turned out to be Philip Harben, who subsequently became famous as a television chef. I went up to his place and we did a sort of mini-animation making trick titles. We took them to a very small, cheap laboratory, and the laboratory destroyed the negative, so there were no titles. And at my own expense I had to go somewhere else and have them made on cards, so that when I'd finished I was two pounds out of pocket.

John Taylor joined the Unit on leaving school in 1930 at the age of 15½.

**Taylor:** They put all the boys through the same kind of thing. You started off as a messenger boy, and you did the projection and the joining, and the joining in those days was a very laborious business. Technically I think the whole thing was rather far behind even the cinema trade at that time. . . The camera equipment was mostly old stuff. . . Grierson, I think most likely all his life, had a kink about using second-hand equipment, you know. And it wasn't really very sensible. Anyway, the boys in the place were trained in a kind of haphazard way to clean cameras and operate cameras and do the projection and do the joining and make the tea and all this kind of thing. Basil and that age group went more or less straight into film-making with no real training at all. Grierson also, you see, didn't know a lot about the film industry. He'd made one film, but his technical knowledge wasn't really very strong. He edited *Drifters*, and he was a very good editor. Well, you can see how well *Drifters* is edited. A lot of the emphasis in those days was on editing.

Edgar Anstey and Arthur Elton were thrown into film-making at the deep end.

**Anstey:** I went off—and some would have said prematurely—entirely on my own to make a film on the Labrador coast. . . I'd done a little still camerawork, but I hadn't had a movie camera in my hand at this time. Grierson sent me down to St. James's Park, I remember, and I spent half a day photographing statues from very low angles—the kind of shooting we believed in, in those days, the sort of looming figures above the lens, very significant stuff. I would have had a second half-day doing this but something or other happened to prevent it. So this was virtually all the film training that I had, and I went off with a lot of film and some lights because there were going to be some interiors in the ship, and some paper on which I was going to write my script. Grierson and his wife, Margaret Grierson, took the stock down to the boat, the Challenger, and we started at Portsmouth. And I took this very kindly, that he was seeing me off personally, and away I went to learn by trial and error.

**Elton:** I knew nothing whatever about films, nothing whatever, and Grierson fired me off with a hand-cranked Debrrie camera, me and an assistant, I think J. N. G. Davidson. Jack Miller was certainly the cameraman, and off we went. I'd no idea

how long the shots ought to be or whether they ought to fit, anything at all, so guided by Jack Miller we began. And we made a film (*Shadow on the Mountain*) which was not completed, which was the first one I tried, based obviously—heaven knows what it looks like now—but when I made it, it was clearly derived from *Turksib* and so on. The sheep and the oncoming of winter were cross-cut in those kind of ways to make one understand the importance of it.

In 1931 Grierson brought Robert Flaherty to Britain to instruct the Unit in special photographic approaches and shoot the material that was edited to make *Industrial Britain*.

**Grierson:** The amount of money put aside for Flaherty was £2,500, so I probably fired him by the time he spent £2,400. So we'd finish off with another hundred or two, you may take it from me. We'd finish it within the £2,500 all right. That would be higher than any other picture because it was rather a budget for Flaherty, not a budget for us. I mean the highest film was *Night Mail*, I think, with £1,800. No, we didn't deal with £2,500 as a rule. (The first picture with £2,500 was *Drifters*, and there never was another in my knowledge that cost as much as that. That meant hiring a boat for a long time, a much more complex thing. But I came out inside the money.)

Apart from that, we made another five pictures out of Flaherty's bits and pieces, so that we had in the long run at least six pictures from Flaherty for the £2,500. And in a way it was the only case of Flaherty being a total commercial success, because with the other five pictures we had of course a very big circulation apart from the theatres...

But right from the beginning we weren't concerned about single pictures. We were concerned about covering territories and opening up new territories in film-making. We weren't concerned about making one film about housing but making dozens of films about housing, not one film about nutrition but dozens of films about nutrition.

**Anstey:** I did the editing of *Industrial Britain* under Grierson's supervision, a lot of it in Merrick Square, where he had a house. He was ill in bed, and I remember rigging up a re-wind over the bed. He had a cutting room in the basement, and I would do some editing, and then we would look at it on a hand-wound 35 mm. projector. Or I would put the re-wind across his bed, and he would sit and pull it to and fro in order to announce that there was some vital shot which I hadn't included. And I would diffidently say that I hadn't noticed this shot, and he would roar with rage, and accuse me of having lost the shot. This was constantly happening because Grierson had a great facility for remembering shots which hadn't been made. And he would never admit that the shot didn't exist because, you see, he was the greatest of all editors in a way because he knew what the shot was that he needed. I mean, he would think, 'Well, Flaherty must have shot that, the old bastard. Couldn't possibly have been there without shooting that.' Flaherty often could. He didn't always make obvious shots, you see. Or Grierson would remember a shot that was in the cut already, which I'd put in, but remember it as being much more magnificent and wonderful because he'd seen perhaps how it might

be used and, as I'd used it, it didn't have the right effect...

*Stuart Legg joined Grierson after making The New Generation for him in 1932.*

**Legg:** He was very much in on scripts. He saw nearly all the rushes, and to some of us who were young and a bit nervous, this was a pretty terrifying process, because in those days Grierson was far from the relatively mellow elder statesman he became. The theatre would reverberate with curses at the slightest mistake in shooting. One learnt a lot at those rushes sessions because he would dissect rushes and take them to pieces... Hosts of possibilities would be tossed out. Then he sat in very closely as films came together on the cutting bench, full of ideas. And he was always there if you got stuck and ran into difficulties. You'd take it to him and say 'I'm stuck. These are the circumstances.' And he would see it with you, and see it again and again, and then would come through with an idea. I think this was one of the things that inspired confidence in him: that he would never leave you without some sort of lifeline to hold on to.

**Wright:** You had to get used to doing without sleep and that sort of thing, but he was the most rewarding person to work with that I've ever met, because he was able to extract from you abilities which you didn't know you had but which he sensed. He never told you how to correct your mistakes. He simply told you how damned lazy, intellectually lazy, you were not to develop the theme which you'd taken, in a proper manner. And you used to be sent back over and over again to reshoot a sequence because it wasn't good enough. Well, this really put you on your mettle. 'Why isn't it good enough?' you said. 'How can I make it better?' And you did. You did.

**Anstey:** I remember once I needed a very simple shot of a stone being put on to a parapet, and I photographed it perhaps in a rather casual way. And Grierson said this laying of the stone meant nothing at all

because it had no feeling of care and craftsmanship. The camera wasn't angled in such a way as to make it interesting. The shots weren't well composed. You didn't get nice shapes and it wouldn't cut so as to get one shape moving against another shape and so on. And so would I be so good as to (he didn't put it nearly as politely as that) go off and shoot it again.

Well, I didn't care to point out that the parapet, I knew, by this time was finished. I had to try to find another similar building where I could photograph the stone being laid, and I telephoned all around and went to various building contractors and at last I found one and got these people to do it again, different people of course. This didn't too much matter because it could be cut in; you wouldn't in the long shots see who the men were that were putting the stone down. I did it again and I brought it back. And Grierson said, 'Well, it still stinks. I suppose it's a bit better but it's not good enough. It's just casually thrown in, becomes just a cut-away between two interesting sequences. It's no good at all. Every shot must stand on its own feet.' He wouldn't use the phrase 'work of art in its own right' but you knew it must have aesthetic quality. 'You'd better have another go.'

And I had to find another building because I knew that this other one had been done. And at last I got a shot which was acceptable. It was better, I think, than the other two. And this was really the way one worked. I mean that you didn't ever say 'Well, it can't be done' or 'It's too late now' because the shot must always come first.

*When Harry Watt joined the EMB Film Unit in 1932, Grierson's movement was already well established.*

**Watt:** The atmosphere in the Empire Marketing Board, and later in the GPO, was quite extraordinary in that Grierson was the god. He was the little dictator and we all sat at his feet, and he was called by the majority of people 'The Chief', and he played up to

'Night Mail' (Harry Watt and Basil Wright, 1936)





Above: Cavalcanti's 'Pett and Pott' (1934); below 'The Fourth Estate' (1940), Paul Rotha's film about 'The Times'

it. He was a great performer. The routine, say, of running the rushes, was quite fantastic. You got them back from the laboratory in the morning. You examined them and put leads on them and then went to the projectionist and had them threaded up. Then you went to this sweet little man, J. P. R. Golightly, who was Grierson's complete right-hand man and shadow and adored him, this little quiet *pince-nez* almost caricature of a civil servant with a very good English voice, and you said 'The rushes are ready.' And he said, 'Very well, Harry. I'll tell the Chief. Wait in the theatre.' So you went back to the theatre and sat down and waited. And you just waited, and sometimes you waited quite a long time. Then you'd hear a crash and that would be Grierson's door being thrown open, and then another bang and that was him kicking the door into the passageway open, and the fast, fast steps coming down the passageway, then crash, the door was kicked open again and in would come Grierson, followed by Golightly. He'd sit down and say 'Right. Shoot.' And you ran your rushes. He would then go into a great deal of stuff which to me who was the lowbrow of the unit (I didn't know any of the highbrow phrases or the social content stuff; I was always just making a picture to tell a story) seemed erudite and not necessarily practical.

The extraordinary thing about the whole atmosphere was that there was no discipline in the Unit, although Grierson was this god. Everybody wandered in and out and there were no hours. We worked every God's hour there was, and wandered out to the pub and had a sandwich and a drink and came back and worked again and very often, if there was a rushed job, slept on the cutting room floor, all for a matter of two or three pounds a week.

The other extraordinary atmosphere about the office, and this is mainly in the EMB days, was the monasticism of it. We were all normal pretty well, but we were absolutely forbidden to get married, and even the fact of having girl friends was rather kept in the

background, even although one or two of us were living with girls at the time. And Grierson fell for this very charming Margaret Taylor, John Taylor's sister, and we knew all about it. She even came and worked there and they got married while she was working there and Grierson didn't admit it for eighteen months. They didn't go out together or arrive together. I mean, you know, a definition of Grierson in many ways is a Presbyterian priest.

**Elton:** He is a philosopher, critic, inspirer, a revealer, prophet if you like. . . He looks at things from so many different facets always, peers at them from one side and then from another side, brings to bear so many other things which are in his mind in association, that his views on almost anything, as he talks, are always revealing. That I think is the most striking element about him, the fact that he can always take hold of factors most people have neglected, see things in things which other people can't or don't see. . . He's a great man for revelation and that I think is his most powerful feature.

Cavalcanti joined Grierson in 1934 when the EMB Film Unit had transferred to the GPO.

**Cavalcanti:** It was a bit difficult to work with Grierson because he had a very confused way of administration. He had a genius for certain things, for instance for finding titles. He used to do some very sort of biting criticism when he saw rushes with me, which was not always the thing because he sometimes passed a very long time without bothering about these technical problems. But he used to come sometimes to Blackheath and, when a boy started cutting, quite rightly put him in projection and put the projectionist in the cutting room and mix everything up, mix it all up.

**Watt:** This very pukka young English boy arrived, and was told that he was to be the projectionist. And this was absolutely typical. He'd never seen a projector in his life, and he was stuck in the projection box. I had rushes to run that morning, and the usual routine went through, bang, bang, crash, bang, 'Shoot! Sit down!' and so the rushes start. And suddenly there's a most ghastly tearing noise and you see the film tearing on the screen and then there's a blank screen. Dead silence. Then the door opens from the projection box, and this little pink face comes round and says, 'I say, sir. I'm damn sorry.' And that was my introduction to Pat Jackson.

**Jackson:** With all his bluff and brusque manner, which he put on, he [Grierson] was a man of great heart and of great kindness and firmness too to his juniors, and we had a great respect for him. But I never worked with him, alongside him. I was much too young in those days. I could hardly sign my own name, let alone write a script which was the only time one would really come into contact with him. . . He had gone by the time I was twenty. When I did my first film, I think, he had left.

**Wright:** For a long time my life was dominated by working with Grierson, and, as the years went by and our difference in status as it were diminished, as it does with age (he was about five years older than I was and at that time that was terrific, just as when Benjamin Britten worked for us as

far as I was concerned he was a little boy), of course everything smoothed up. So Grierson and I ended up as very close personal friends, and ditto with his wife who's sort of my favourite woman in the world. And I would say the most rewarding thing which ever happened to anybody in those days was to get a chance to work for Grierson for a long time: rewarding personally, psychologically and rewarding in terms of work, of learning how to make films. He was a great, great teacher. To have him and Cavalcanti in the same set-up was absolutely magical. It was worth a million pounds to any young man to be there.

He always gave a creative contribution on any film he was producing. I can tell you about the *Song of Ceylon* one. . . I felt that I had finalised the cut of the film. In fact I said to Grierson, 'Now can I show it to you before it goes in for negative cutting?' 'O.K.' he said. So I showed him the film, and he said, 'That is absolutely marvellous except that there's something so terrible at the end that you've got to put it right.' He said, 'You've got all this tremendous thing with the little man worshipping the Great Buddha and so on. He walks out of the picture and bang, crash, without a moment at all, you have all these people doing this enormous dance, this violent dance.' And he said 'It's a stupidity. It's a *bêtise*. It doesn't work. . .'

I was by this time really rather exhausted. I'd been working on the film like a demon for months and months, and I couldn't see the point at all. And we had—the first time I ever had it with Grierson, in fact really the only time—we had a real bang up and down row. I got into my car, and went home. I remember I went back to my flat and I sat down and started drinking. Then I went to bed. I got up next morning and had a large breakfast, and I paced up and down. Then I started drinking. I refused to answer the telephone. I refused to go to the studio.

Then on the second night, I found myself thinking about the film and suddenly got an idea. I got into my car—I was living in Highgate at the time—and drove all the way down to the Blackheath studios, got into the studios soon after midnight, picked up a second take of the man reading that prayer on the mountain (which happens at the beginning of the film, in the first reel), chopped it up and related those phrases to the shots of the men dressing for the dance, which I hadn't used at all.

When Grierson arrived at the studio the next morning, I was still there. I hadn't bothered to go home, and I said, 'Would you mind coming to see the last reel again?' He sat and looked at it, and he said, 'There, what did I tell you? There's absolute genius.' But what you've got to notice is that he never said, 'Why don't you do this or don't you do that?' He merely said, 'You're traducing yourself. You're making a nonsense of the end of a very beautiful film.' And he was right, and I was right because I found out how to do it. Because that sequence is vitally important to the end of the film.

**Watt:** To my mind Grierson's tremendous function was in protecting us embryo filmmakers, because that's basically what we were, from the pressures of the sponsors.

And he did this by his unending propaganda in writing and talking and also by 'selling' the films. He had the ability to persuade people that our often pretty feeble efforts were works of art or moving towards a new art form. I remember, I think it was *Coal Face* which was partly shot underground, the camerawork to put it mildly didn't come up to what was expected. It was bloody dark. Despite the efforts of the laboratory to get the brightest and clearest prints they could, in certain shots there was very little to be seen at all. And Grierson brilliantly converted this into a purposeful thing. As the film was being shown to the sponsors he would explain that this is what we were trying to do, that in point of fact we wanted it to be as dark as this in order to give the impression of the dreadfulness and the difficulties of working underground. This was justifiable. . .

The main thing to remember is not that all the films were gems. They were, many of them, amateur and second-rate, but they were revolutionary because they were putting on the screen for the first time in British films and very nearly in world films . . . a working man's face and working man's hands and the way the worker lived and worked. It's very hard with television nowadays and everything to realise how revolutionary this was. . . And *Drifters*, every credit to Grierson, was the first time . . . We started to try to give the working man, the real man who contributes to the country, a dignity. Every film we made had this in it, that we were trying to give an image of the working man, away from the Edwardian, Victorian, capitalist attitudes. And in this we were suspect. In this the Establishment didn't like us. . .

We were on a razor's edge. We were always financed by the Establishment and the Establishment basically regretted that they'd started this thing. To start with we were left-wing to a man. Not many of us were communists, but we were all socialists and I'm sure we had dossiers because we demonstrated and worked for the Spanish war. Grierson overtly never did. Now what he did behind the scenes—I knew nothing about his political beliefs. But we were on a razor's edge. . . It would have been utterly impossible, we'd have committed suicide, to have come out and made completely left-wing statements. As you know, in the EMB days, a detective was put in as a trainee editor, a man from the Special Branch. And we all knew who he was and we made his life such hell by going behind the cutting room door and saying, 'All right for tonight, Joe? Got the bomb? The job's on.' He twigged of course immediately that he'd been spotted. . . But there were always people until late in the Thirties who were wanting to shut us down and cut us off. We weren't permanent civil servants or anything like that. Our life was really very precarious. . .

**Rotha:** Right from the earliest 1929, 1930 days, it was encouraged for us all as we grew in size, to meet in the evenings and to talk and of course obviously to drink within reasonable limits. . . We talked about the films which were being shown in London, I mean the entertainment films, and we discussed politics. We talked of everything you can think of for about an hour, an hour and a half. . . And this I believe—and I've

thought a great deal about this in later years—was one of the *raison d'être*, one of the reasons for the success of that period of the British documentary film.

**Wright:** The local pub was very important. We used to go there every evening, and we'd go to one pub for two years and then suddenly, like lemmings, we would desert it and move to another one. . . We played shove-halfpenny and darts and drank bitter and we talked and we talked. All sorts of people used to drift in. Grierson had a marvellous sort of magnetism, you know. If any eminent film person was in London, Grierson would find him and bring him around and, as often as not, to the pub in the evening.

**Rotha:** It was in a way like an English equivalent of café life in Paris. Instead of foregathering at the Deux Magots or the Dôme or whatever, we used the local pub in Soho. . . I remember D. W. Griffith, the great Griffith, coming there one evening, and we almost knelt at his feet in memory of *Intolerance*, *Birth of a Nation*, *Broken Blossoms*. (There was to be a remake of that but it never came off.) Josef von Sternberg came one evening. Al Lewin came one evening, and of course Flaherty spent a lot of his time with us. . .

**Wright:** Also of course there were the Friday night shows which were awfully important. Apart from Blackheath, you see, we had these offices in 21 Soho Square, which had quite a large cinema—I forget how many it would seat, but maybe eighty. And the tradition sprang up—it was started by Grierson—of having what was called a Friday night show. . . New GPO films, when they were finished, got their first showing there. . . And then if anybody was around they came along. If Moholy-Nagy was in London with a new abstract film, somehow he'd turn up there with the film. . . Even if they hadn't got films they'd turn up. Carl Theodor Dreyer turned up, and he was in a terrible state. He was very nervous and that sort of thing. At the end of the evening Grierson got hold of me and said 'Come on, Bas. You live down in the country. Your parents won't mind. Take him down for a quiet weekend.' So I found myself saddled with Dreyer, who was on the edge of a nervous breakdown. . . Paul Hindemith came for one whole evening and saw films, talked about film music.

**Rotha:** This disappeared of course in later years completely. But like all movements in other arts, the post-impressionists in Paris and so on, this movement grew up in London round Soho Square, and I feel when that died—I don't wish in any way to be nostalgic about this—but I feel something moved out of the sort of inspiration behind our group. The war inevitably was partly responsible for this, because when the GPO became the Crown Film Unit and as such moved from its modest premises in London out to the larger facilities of Pinewood Studios, the whole of that section moved away down to Buckinghamshire and became remote from us. Grierson himself, always of course a very central figure, Grierson was in Canada, in America, later in Australia, but only on spasmodic visits to England. And the whole movement, as a movement, just sort of disintegrated.

**Legg:** Grierson . . . a figure who rose up for

no particular immediate reason one can see. His grandfather, I believe, was a lighthouse keeper. His father was a village dominie in Scotland, and his mother was evidently a very remarkable woman of great strength. A large family, and Grierson came south in common with a lot of other Scots. . .

He made certain contributions which were decisive at a certain moment. He developed the sponsorship formula which generated millions of money, not only in this country but in Canada, Australia, America, everywhere else. Enormous sums came, one way or another, out of this formula. The other thing was that he developed a school of film-making in which, in bringing on young people, he never would fail them for support, for an idea. He could have blazing rows with them. He could fire them from his presence and for ever, and did on certain occasions, not very many but now and then.

Now why? Why did this happen? And why did they all take certain lines of their own; I mean Basil his in the poetic field, Arthur his in the scientific area, and so on? I think because Grierson had a certain kind of personality. He was never interested in money. He never earned any serious money. He was interested in power: schools, continuity, strength, development not of one person but of many. And he believed that power lay along this sort of road and not along an individual road.

The same thing happened on the other side of the fence. The sponsors who nursed and supported and gave the thing the climate which enabled good work to be done, again were people of a certain personal standard. And I think so much of all this depends not on the organisation and the administration, though it has importance, but on the peculiar quirks of fate, accidents, mistakes if you like, that make certain people misfits and drive them into this kind of activity and generate lines of thinking from their own bellies. They defend themselves. They come together to a certain extent, yes, in schools like Grierson developed, like Rotha developed, but I think that in the long run it all depends on a series of accidents, just happenings, chance. You will find it all in the last thirty pages of *War and Peace*. ■

Grierson in the golden years





# FESTIVALS 1972



## Cannes Penelope Houston

Grumbling is more or less an endemic condition among festival-goers. The films, and the weather, are never what they were, or what they might be; one's used to arriving, at around the halfway point, to be greeted with woebegone assurances that one hasn't missed a thing and that the occasion is the dulllest on record. It's a contagious state of mind, having less to do, I think, with the actual number of bad films seen (though they're seldom hard to find) than with a claustrophobic awareness of the sheer weight of celluloid about the place, round the clock screenings of too many movies whose only appeal, as with some children, must surely be to their makers. It only takes one outstanding picture to effect an instant cure; and if this year at Cannes the complaints seemed to last longer than usual, I doubt if the Festival was really to blame. There was, as always, a good deal of value on the screen. The missing element—missing maybe from the cinema at the moment and not just the Festival—was the excitement of the unpredictable.

Perhaps a 'strong' jury, under the chairmanship of Joseph Losey, gave a kind of recognition to this in their rather lukewarm and eccentric division of the Grand Prix between two Italian films, Francesco Rosi's **The Mattei Affair** and Elio Petri's **The Working Class Goes to Heaven**, both starring Gian Maria Volonté. The Rosi film is by far the stronger: a precise, intelligent, watchable journalistic investigation, with occasional rumblings from the cellars of *Citizen Kane*, into the life and times of Enrico Mattei, head of the all-powerful Italian state oil company ENI. Mattei died ten years ago when his private plane crashed in heavy rain, and the film is dense with suggestions of sabotage. Tackled about this at his press conference, Rosi came up with a classic riposte: if Mattei wasn't murdered on this particular occasion, he almost certainly would have been on some other one. And it's a weakness of the film that its suggestive surface, its shrewdness about the pressures and traps of Mattei's extraordinary power, its fascination with the mechanics of communication, also remains at surface level. Where *Salvatore Giuliano* cut into an ant-hill of speculation and motive, *The Mattei Affair* leaves an impression of containing less than meets the eye. All the same, Volonté's hot ice performance as the embodiment of state capitalism glitters by comparison with the one in Elio Petri's film, where he's a workman being driven berserk by pressures of the assembly line. One excellent scene, in which he visits an elderly co-worker who has retreated to the madhouse, doesn't save much of the rest from looking noisily schematic and stretched. But the jury would seem to have voted Volonté.

The Italian film of the Festival was of course Fellini's **Roma**, presented rather disdainfully out of competition. I am out of sympathy with most of the concerns that go to make up Fellini's screen world; I feel I've seen enough for a lifetime of the fat ladies,

Top left: 'Solaris'. Centre: 'Red Psalm'. Below: 'The Mattei Affair'

the glittering grotesques, the reminiscences of that priest-haunted childhood, the music-hall memories and anti-clerical jests. *Roma* reverts to all of these; yet, paradoxically, the preoccupations seem much more sympathetic when encountered on autobiographical home ground than when they are being dragged in the baggage train of a plot. *Roma* is, in its way, as bloated as *Satyricon*; but it has all its director's superabundant vitality, as well as the authentic, egotistic charm that derives from his readiness to couple Fellini with Rome.

In fact, the first half of the film is most expansively and familiarly Fellini—the schooldays, the arrival of the frail young man from the provinces in the monstrous and teeming city *pensione*. There is a bizarre and superlatively theatrical evocation of an air-raid alert on the open city; an ecclesiastical fashion show (skipping, wimpled nuns and roller-skating priests) is used, against its own silliness, to conjure up the lost, overripe world of an embalmed aristocracy; and in the film's richest and most suggestive sequence, workmen excavating the new subway break through into a Roman villa, whose painted frescoes shiver and dissolve as the outside air hits them. At the end, as motorcyclists roar past the floodlit buildings and out into the dark, the contrast of ancient stone and modern din somehow lifts a piece of obvious, unadventurous symbolism to the level of a *tour de force* heavy with the extravagance of nightmare. Rome is the big top for this Fellini circus; and even if one doesn't share his feeling about circuses, or his indulgence towards turns that have outstayed their welcome, the stage is made for the ringmaster. No film-maker is at once so worldly and so naive.

As Fellini dominates *Roma*, so Jancsó dominates *Red Psalm*: both films are essentially expressions of a director's will. Jancsó's festival films lately seem to come in pairs, and last year at London I preferred the Italian offering, *The Pacifist*, to the Hungarian, *Agnus Dei*. This time, the situation is reversed. *Technique and Rite*, which Jancsó made for RAI and which was shown in the Directors' Fortnight, seems all too finally and completely summed up by its title. A study of the young Attila, feeling his way towards authority and destiny in a Jancsó gathering of dancing, threatening, drumming, arrow-shooting young men by a rocky shore, it has an hermetic isolation, an absolute reliance on the power of ritual. And, as in the two previous films, we get the smoking torches, the association of epilepsy with violence, the more numbing paraphernalia of Jancsó-land.

*Red Psalm* is another matter: reassurance that Jancsó has by no means yet worked himself into a corner, and his most impressive film, it seems to me, since *Confrontation*. Once again, the setting is the great plain; once again, the screen is inhabited by peasants, soldiers, horses, naked girls. Unless there was general miscounting, the film contains only 26 shots, choreographed in stunningly elaborate and nervous patterns of movement, with horses repeatedly criss-crossing between the camera and the main focus of attention. The peasants dance and link arms and sing ('Charlie is My Darling' makes a wonderfully eccentric appearance). Against their buoyant temper of freedom are arrayed the soldiers, the unshifting forces

of the church, the dying landowning class. The limitation of Jancsó's style as it has developed, into a kind of perpetual motion ballet of liberation and oppression, is that it has abandoned the intellectual argument of the earlier films: on this great open stage, action must be resolved into what can be conveyed through ritual, and the permanent simplifications that go with it. But where *Agnus Dei* seemed a closed and troubled film, *Red Psalm* has recovered the dynamism which is an essential element in this perilous style. Its imagery, as befits a ballet, is often blindingly simple and very strong: the soldier gazing into a stream which suddenly runs crimson with blood, the solitary, avenging girl shooting down a misty army.

Jancsó won the Director's Prize, and in the face of the *mise en scène* of *Red Psalm* it would have been hard to give it to anyone else. Among the few rivals worthy of the name in competition, however, one would certainly rate Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris*, somnambulistic science fiction, and Russia's answer to 2001 not in its display of space hardware but in the speculative quality of its ideas. The film opens very quietly and slowly, in a Russian country house, a landscape of lakes and green gardens, like a Turgenev setting overshadowed by intimations from space. We watch the people in the house as they in turn watch film of scientists in Moscow, viewing and discussing more film of an astronaut's hallucinatory adventure: the Chinese-box pattern, and the bafflingly oblique and haunted feel of the early sequences, suggest Resnais at least as much as Kubrick. There's an extraordinary nonstop car drive (the *Solaris* trip?) along what look like the freeways of Tokyo. And then the rather stolid hero arrives at the space station hovering on the edge of *Solaris*, the unknown planet, whose surface is all oily, cloudy sea—a 'sentient ocean', as Stanislaw Lem's novel describes it. The arrival is masterly: the seemingly deserted, disordered space station, the phantoms glimpsed out of the corner of the eye, the discovery of the two men aboard locked up madly with their ghosts. For the hero, *Solaris* conjures up the spectre of his wife, long ago dead by suicide, and a kindlier shadow than his companions seem to be entertaining. But the spaceship love story is only part of the film's fabric, and its final magnificently mysterious image is of another kind of return, the house of the early sequences rising as an island in the sea of *Solaris*. Where Lem's novel is explanatory, Tarkovsky's film reaches out towards cloudier concepts about human understanding. It's a film which rewards the patience it demands.

The ways of festivals are as mysterious as the ways of alien planets. Cannes could accept a French entry as trivial as de Broca's *Chère Louise*, a pale story in which Jeanne Moreau runs the gamut of Bette Davis moods and expressions as an ageing schoolmistress smitten with a flighty young Italian, but incomprehensibly exiled from competition a picture as expertly engaging as John Huston's *Fat City*. No doubt the movie is old-fashioned, but that's its character: a return by the director to an old stamping-ground, the despondent lower reaches of the fight game, and a story about two fighters, one rising and one sinking, the destructive

influences of women, the cheap little towns of glaring white streets and shadowy bar-rooms. Huston calls the film 'modest', which is a way of saying that he hasn't put too much pressure on it. Apart from Susan Tyrell, who does carry on a bit as Stacy Keach's alcoholic nemesis, the playing is exact, the timing relaxed, the detail consistently pleasurable. Comparisons with early Hemingway seem slightly off the mark; the plus quality in Huston's film is its sense of reminiscence, and it takes a film-maker who has seen it all to come back to this kind of modesty.

Old cinema, in effect, came up much stronger at Cannes than new cinema. The Critics' Week, which used to be a source of discovery, is going through a bad patch of febrile 'experiment' and television-style disputation. *Winter Soldier*, for instance, records a meeting at which Vietnam veterans flayed themselves and their audience with stories of atrocities committed and witnessed: revealing, appalling evidence of the ultimate callousness of conditioned attitudes, and yet at the same time, as with so many avid, unchecked public confessions, a film not perhaps wholly to be trusted. There was also *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*, a rather self-righteous reconstruction directed by Gordon Davidson, produced by Gregory Peck and photographed by Haskell Wexler, of the trial of the Berrigan brothers and their associates for burning draft records. Both these nearly non-films exist to bare the American conscience; *vérité* as always winning hands down over reconstruction. The interesting thing, one feels, might be to get Mr. Peck together with the anonymous makers of *Winter Soldier*.

Elsewhere at Cannes, a series of films by women directors chose to display itself under the slightly unhappy title of No Man's Land. I can't see much point in this sort of cultural apartheid, nor in the surly Women's Lib gesture of splashing drips of red paint over the three-breasted wolf-woman in the poster for *Roma*. Women directors have done better in the past, when without cordoning themselves off they have had better films to show. But this year, there were no women's features in the Directors' Fortnight, and in the main Festival only Lina Wertmüller's *Mimi Metallurgico Ferito nell'Onore*, an absurdly titled exercise in loud comedy, Germi-style, with a hero in a hairnet, and a vulgar disappointment after her excellent *The Lizards*.

The Directors' Fortnight remains the great international lucky dip. Mehrjui's *The Postman*, with its charms and longueurs and erratically shifting moods, came hot from Tehran. Christopher Mason's modest, 16 mm. *All the Advantages* and Loach's *Family Life* represented Britain. The pejorative adjective 'sensitive' dangles over Mason's film, a faintly literary study of a public schoolboy in retreat from adult expectations, pressures and blankly possessive attitudes. But even in its occasional uncertainties and awkwardnesses, *All the Advantages* leaves an impression of a mind at work, a quintessentially English setting recorded with a mixture of sympathy and loathing. It's the sort of small film that leaves you inquisitive about how its director would do with more to work on.

Finally, James Ivory's *Savages* comes across as one of the real oddities, a film on the



'Savages': encounter between a savage (Paulita Sedgwick) and a portrait

face of it having little common ground with his Indian pictures, but confirming a guess that Ivory's talents are rather those of the essayist, the man with a taste for playing with an idea, than of the narrative filmmaker. The idea here is that a savage tribe, the thoroughly unprepossessing Mud People, are lured by an errant croquet ball into a vast, derelict mansion in New York State. Here, under the influence of its portraits and furbelows and cool elegance, they are soon dressing for dinner, exchanging phrases out of etiquette books, and playing a malicious style of barbed comedy. After this parabola, there's nowhere to go but down: the journey from barbarism to decadence must be duly completed, and a final maniacal croquet game sends everyone back to the dubious pleasures of the wild woods. The film's beginning and end are sticky passages, necessary to its logic but in themselves smacking somewhat of a Shavian prologue and epilogue. But the central section of *Savages* sparks with detached wit and allusiveness: pre-war house party comedy, with an edge that comes from the bizarre circumstance, the awareness that there are no reference points and can be no conclusions. *Savages* is a kind of conceit, making sophisticated play with an idea in itself almost too elementary: not everyone's film, by any means, but at least erratically alive and wholly of itself.

## Cannes

### Richard Roud

The great justification for film festivals is the discovery of new talent, someone from out of the blue, or at least from Patagonia. This year Cannes did not afford any such discoveries. But there were revelations of a sort. Directors one had given up on years ago suddenly turned out either masterpieces or something approaching. There was *Fat City*, there was *Frenzy*, and for me, who had despaired of Jancsó in recent years, there was

*Red Psalm*. There was also Teshigahara's *Summer Soldiers*—not to be confused with the remarkable American *Winter Soldier*.

Teshigahara made his name at Cannes with *Woman of the Dunes*. Since that 1964 Festival, when he won the Jury Prize, he has made only two films—*The Face of Another* and *Man Without a Map*, both of them symbol-ridden and Kafkaesquely allegorical. So *Summer Soldiers* was something of a surprise. True, the blurb had already given cause for hope: 'In my preceding films I often expressed myself abstractly. In this one I wanted to anchor the idea (the difficulties of communication between men of different cultures) in everyday reality.' The film is about a G.I. deserter in Japan, and it was shot in both English and Japanese. Jim is a country boy, very much attached to the guitar. His reasons for desertion are left as vague as they are in his own mind: a generalised rejection of violence. He is first helped by his bar-girl friend, who introduces him into the well organised Deserter Circuit. He is shunted from one highminded Japanese family to another, never staying very long in one place. They are kind to him, but there is the cultural gap and, more important, he begins to resent the fact that no one is interested in him, Jim, only in that abstract entity, an American deserter.

Surprising as it will seem to anyone who knows Teshigahara's work, the film is often very funny—the culture clash is also expressed on the comic level of 'Too many bones in this fish' or 'What do you call this?' This being a fry-pan mess, to which the disconcerting reply is 'No name'. Eventually Jim wearies of the endless round, and is persuaded by some sympathetic American to return to the army, the better to militate from within. But by this time, he has a much better idea of who he is, and so do we. Very simply made, with none of the pretentiousness of Teshigahara's previous films, *Summer Soldiers* made a very strong impression. 'Everyday reality' has a lot to be said for it.

Maurice Pialat is another late developer. He didn't make his first short until he was

35, and *L'Enfance Nue*, his first feature, was made at the age of 42. Since then he has worked quite successfully for French TV; and now, at the ripe old age of 46, he has given us *Nous ne Vieillirons pas Ensemble*, the film that will, I think, at last make him a well known name. The provisional English title is *Break-up*, and that is the subject of the film. Jean, a married man (Jean Yanne), has been going with Catherine (Marlène Jobert) for six years—six years of constant fights, reconciliations and new separations. In other words, what Proust so aptly called 'les intermittences du coeur'. But the setting is far from the Faubourg St. Germain: Pialat has set the film in the same lower middle-class milieu as his first feature, and he has rendered it in all its visual horror (the wallpaper alone merits a treatise).

Of course, his subject is banal, and it has not been jazzed up. Each sequence is treated in a naturalistic manner, but the editing of the sequences is so elliptical that the effect is often almost Bressonian. Pialat sticks closely to his subject, thus running the risk of reducing his audience either to boredom or alternatively to a case of the giggles, as we watch the couple split, come back together, break up again, *ad infinitum*, or almost. What saves the film is its sincerity and its performances: Yanne and Jobert succeed so totally in incarnating the characters that one's sympathies are constantly shifting from one to the other. Yanne, in particular, achieves the nearly impossible feat of making us sympathise with an intolerable personality—the kind of man who throws away happiness with both hands. By the time he has realised his mistake, it is too late.

Pialat is not over-concerned with structure, and the film is too realistic to be dramatically entirely satisfactory. But it doesn't seem to matter. 'Very French,' a lot of the foreign critics here said; and the French critics concurred. The name of Renoir was even evoked, and it's not so far off as all that. Pialat has the same kind of attention to detail, the same restraint, the same warmth, the same tragic undertones. The hedgehog triumphs again.

*Land of Silence and Darkness* is Werner Herzog's latest film, and when one adds that it is about a German Helen Keller, the automatic response must be, 'Oh no!' But as so often, this response would be wrong. It is nothing like Herzog's *Dwarfs* film; in fact, it is like nothing else at all. On the surface, it is the straightest of documentaries: we are introduced to 56-year-old Fini Straubinger as she makes her way around Bavaria trying to help others who are deaf and blind. ('*Wir sind Schicksalskameraden*'—'We are comrades in our destiny'—is her invariable opening line.) She herself went blind at fifteen and deaf at eighteen, and thereafter took to her bed for thirty years. How she came back from the land of silence and darkness Herzog—curiously—does not tell us. Or perhaps he does, in the sense that as we see Fini helping others, so someone must have helped her. There are some upsetting moments in the film. How could it be otherwise when the subject matter is, as always with Herzog, at the limits of the human experience, on the shadow-line, as it were? But it is often exalting, too. In spite of their infirmities, these are still human beings, and on occasion delightful ones. We see Fini

taking a group on their first airplane ride, and a little old lady—deaf and blind, remember—claps her hands with glee, a look of indescribable pleasure on her face. We watch a group at the Botanical Gardens, coming to terms with a cactus; we see them at the zoo, handling the animals, touching an elephant's trunk with a wild surmise.

As perhaps befits the subject-matter, technique is minimal, with only the occasional lyrical outburst, as when a blind woman evokes her last memory from the days when she could see, and Herzog intercuts a ski jump, with the skiers gliding through the air. The poignancy is intense because it is not underlined. *Variety*, I note, has summed it up as 'a strictly non-commercial film'. I wonder. It's being broadcast on German television this month; maybe the BBC ought to take a look at it.

## Tehran

### John Russell Taylor

With the passion critics have for fitting individual phenomena into larger patterns, it is always tempting, on discovering the first, let us say, Norwegian or Madagascan or Indonesian film-maker of certain talent, to postulate a renaissance, or at least naissance, of a national cinema, then look for the summer the one swallow ought in our estimation to make. Usually, of course, in vain. A Forman or a Jancsó may herald a whole new school of film-makers, but Satyajit Ray and Shadi Abdelsalam seem defiantly one of a kind. And would Daryush Mehrjui, maker of *The Cow*, prove likewise? Very possibly. Even after *The Cow* had won golden opinions at Venice, London and elsewhere last year (though the film he made subsequently, *Mr. Gullible*, had already passed unremarked at Moscow), it was quite conceivable that he might be the only Iranian film-maker of any interest; and, for that matter, that he might himself be a one-film director. However, once such a question has been raised it is necessary to find the answer, and obviously a major attraction in an invitation to the first Tehran Festival was the prospect of doing some first-hand research into the present state of the Iranian cinema.

In the event this proved the principal, though by no means the only, interest of the Festival. For getting new films in competition it was awkwardly timed, coming as it did just before Cannes. In the circumstances, the overall standard of entries (Kozintsev's *King Lear*, Kluge, *The Boy Friend*, etc.) was unexpectedly high, though there were a few films, like the Egyptian *Love and Position* (the reference has no Kama Sutra overtones, but is to social standing), which obviously had no place in a festival at all. The only trouble was that most of us had seen most of the films before. Even so, there were one or two discoveries in the main body of the Festival. A film from Kuwait called *The Cruel Sea* was shown the day before I arrived, and much liked by everyone who saw it. And the Bulgarian entry, *The End of a Song*, directed by Milen Nikolov, had a certain dogged distinction: perhaps the pleasures to be derived from its drama of doomed peasants were very much those of primitive art, but once

over a sticky first twenty minutes it exerted a real obsessive grip, most compelling when it went over most unashamedly into operatic melodrama.

And then there were the Iranian entries. Both of them struck me, in their very different ways, as distinguished pieces of work. And both were first films of remarkable confidence. The more approachable, by far, is Bahram Baizai's *Hard Rain* (also variously translated as *Downpour*, *Drizzle*, *Sleet* and almost every other meteorological condition imaginable). It is a sort of Iranian *Up the Down Staircase*, about an idealistic young teacher who comes to a run-down slum school, gradually wins over the pupils, and himself cleans and paints his classroom until it is totally transformed, only in the end to incur the envy of the headmaster, who takes the first opportunity to have him transferred elsewhere. All this is told with a wealth of eccentric detail, and very beautifully photographed in black-and-white. The effect is entirely charming, and sentimentality, ever lurking on the sidelines, is kept firmly at bay by Baizai's willingness to see the funny side even of his not too virtuous hero. The film is much too long, and occasionally overreaches itself stylistically, perhaps in the director's understandable determination to assert his independence of his theatrical origins. But he obviously has a real talent.

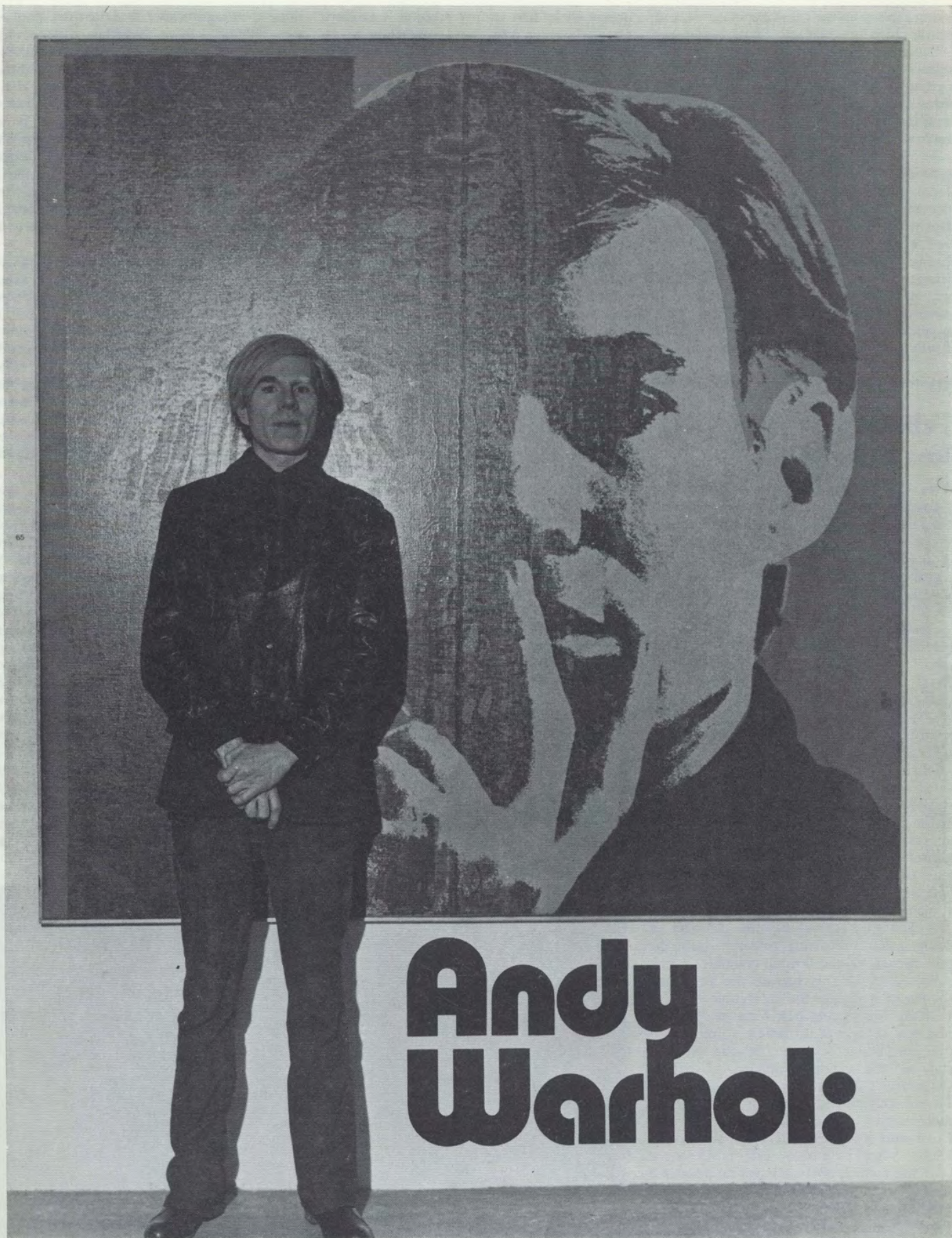
The other Iranian entry, *The Spring*, is a very different kettle of fish. Its writer-director, Arbi Avanesian, trained at the London Film School, and is clearly conscious of most of the influences at work in international cinema. In particular, one would guess, of Straub, whose myopically intense camera observation of people and objects seems to have left its mark on Avanesian's style and structure: throughout the film he constantly returns to certain objects—a tree trunk, a scatter of glasses on the ground—as though to endow them with some quasi-symbolic significance. (And indeed, I am told that the glasses do have

some clear significance to Armenian spectators, though I have forgotten what it is.) The result is a film which remains obscure even to most Iranians, and is half fascinating, half merely maddening, to anyone else. Practically everyone in it dies, and the director gives one to understand that it is a meditation on death, various types and levels of death. But since his notion of death seems, at least within the context of the film, to be unrelated to any notion of life, the exercise is disturbingly remote and hermetic. All the same, he does seem to be someone worth watching.

Other first films appear to be cropping up in plenty in Iran. Another that I saw, Khosrow Haritash's *Adamak*, also suggests an assured film-maker (he trained at U.S.C.) with something to say about the present state of Iran, if not always yet able to transcend the novelette in saying it. However, his particular gift seems to be that of relating his action to the background of the Iranian scene without making the exotic details look as though they have been dragged in for their own sake. But still the star talent of this cinema seems to be Daryush Mehrjui. His latest film, *Postchi* (*The Postman*), also shown on the fringes of the Festival, is an advance even on *The Cow*. It is a complex comedy-drama about a part-time postman who has become obsessed with lotteries to the exclusion of his job, his beautiful young wife, and the interests of his other employers, who include a mad landowner busy transforming his failing sheep farm into a modern piggery, and an equally demented doctor who keeps our hero scouring the woods for plants he may be able to use in new nature cures. Visually striking, it manages its succession of strange and dangerous changes of pace and mood with mature mastery, and gets extraordinary performances out of Ezat Entezami, the hero of *The Cow*, and Ali Nassirian, hero of *Mr. Gullible*. It is hard to remember that Mehrjui, the veteran of this new Iranian cinema, with already four films to his credit, is still only 28. ■

'The Postman'





Dennis J. Cipnic

**Iconographer**

A recent article about Andy Warhol as movie-maker suggested that his films 'will probably survive as legends, rather than as living classics.' It is the premise of this essay that they are not legends, but very real, 'living', radical works which have expanded the bounds of film aesthetics. Which is quite a lot to claim for one film-maker.

To substantiate this claim, it's first necessary to look briefly at the disconcerting beginnings in visual communication of Warhol as a painter. At the outset, he seemingly abandoned two of modern art's most fundamental tenets: that the artist's work must owe the greater part of the inspiration for its existence to the artist's own imagination\*; and that the work must be unique, or at the very least be numbered and signed.

Warhol's paintings seem to fit neither of these requirements. First, they appear to be almost literal copies of objects created by others. The soup cans (reputedly painted from advertisements), silkscreened coloured portrait photographs and painted reproductions of the front pages of newspapers are, undeniably, magnified images of the actual objects they represent. Secondly, almost everything Warhol has made, he has made by the dozens, scores and even hundreds. (There are supposedly 700 versions of the Campbell Soup Can.) At times he has used assembly lines; many of the Brillo and Del Monte boxes were manufactured by others at his order, and are unsigned and unnumbered. Warhol himself has said that Gerard Malanga does all his paintings. And Brigid Polk has claimed that she does them. 'Andy doesn't do art any more,' she said. 'He's bored with it.'

It is hardly surprising that in virtually any commentary on Warhol's work, his 'super cool' personality gradually becomes the principal subject under discussion. But the possibility that he has been teasing his interviewers, the question of whether or not he has political or social consciousness, and even his sexuality or the lack of it, are properly left to his many would-be biographers. 'What interests us,' as Marcel Duchamp said, 'is the concept that wants to put fifty Campbell's Soup Cans on canvas.' In other words, is Warhol's work also a put-on, or is he attempting to make a valid statement?

It seems to me that this is a fundamental point in determining the significance of his films. They are so radically different from what had normally been conceived of as film art that they lead to two diametrically opposed critical views. '... He had almost nothing to say,' wrote film critic Hollis Alpert, 'and therefore substituted camp and, at best, put-on... However, there are always some unwary critics around ready to find significance in amateurish improvisation.' That is one view. To David Bourdon, writing in *Art in America*, 'Warhol has revolutionised traditional aesthetics... His films have had an overwhelming effect upon an entire generation of film-makers.'

This is not a difference of degree but of absolutes. To Alpert, Warhol is an amateur whose work is virtually a waste of time; to Bourdon, he has 'revolutionised' aesthetics. If Alpert is correct, there is no useful purpose in any study of Warhol's work, even from a negative point of view. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote, 'If you board the wrong train, it is no use running along the corridor in the opposite direction.' But is Alpert right?

Warhol's paintings are not the random copies of meaningless objective reality that they might appear to be. Each is an element of that reality which he has unerringly edited from those portions of its environment which are extraneous to his intent. He has had 'something to say' in virtually every work he has undertaken. Reproductions cannot do justice, for example, to his silkscreened portraits of Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis, in which by repetition, colouring and selectivity he managed to formalise the plastic public horror underlying her funeral grief and make it the real subject of his work. Nor is there any escaping the fact that in the atrociously pasty, dyed images of Marilyn, Warhol has created from a single photograph a new image, an icon of the American Sex Dream gone mad. In fact, this is exactly where Warhol's power lies: somehow he has managed to isolate, from the clutter of reality, a stunning procession of the core icons of modern society. And forced us to see them for what they are. The selection of images does seem unquestionably to spring from the artist's imagination (see tenet 1).

'Warhol,' one art critic has written, 'is an example of the artist as the perfect medium—both in the spiritualist and artistic sense.' Others have seen his artistic intent in the multiplicity of his works (tenet 2): 'It is a vision of how men are used as product', '... a reflection of an age of rampant commercial exploitation.'

That Warhol is an authentic artist is a view held doubtless by virtually everyone, not excluding Warhol himself. 'Why is *Chelsea Girls* art?' said Warhol. 'Well, first of all, it was made by an artist... What is generally meant by the assumption, however, is that Warhol has established his *bona fides* as a painter. In the body of his work (which has now assumed in some art circles the status of a 'canon'), film is generally regarded as only one aspect, a new type of canvas, on which Warhol the painter has chosen to express himself. And what, after all, is there peculiar to film art in an eight-hour long shot of the Empire State Building?

Film critics have found his movies to be 'slumberous', 'infinitely boring', 'filthy', 'camp', 'undermining the accepted notions of the American commercial and entertainment film, and 'the first really new kind of montage since Eisenstein.' His characters have been regarded as 'depraved', 'hilarious', 'frighteningly real' and 'a mirror image of the nightmare that the American dream has become.' And there is Warhol's own com-

\*'The aesthetic work is in the first place imposed on the artist from within in response to some creative demand... the work of art springs from subjective causality...'—Jean-Paul Weber.

ment: 'The camerawork is bad, the lighting is awful, the technical work is terrible—but the people are fantastic.'

Where is the truth in this contradictory maze, to which Warhol himself contributes? Why is it that, in spite of a multitude of alleged deficiencies, other workers in the medium find themselves drawn again and again to his movies? I would argue that, whether his inspiration has been instinctive or conscious and deliberate, Warhol has identified and made clear an important aesthetic fundamental of the medium: it creates icons. That is the essential thrust of his work in films.

In retrospect it can be seen that, even from its earliest days, the creation of iconographic reality is where the cinema's aesthetic strength has always been. Nevertheless, the reason for crediting Warhol (unless someone can establish a film-maker with better *bona fides*) with a clear identification of this principle is because he has worked continuously, in an unbroken and observable line, from the commercial drawn illustration of reality; through paintings which use elements of reality; to silkscreens utilised as a method of photo-mechanical reproduction; to the photographic image itself (which is frozen reality); to the photo used in multiples; to the moving picture used statically as a device further to reinforce imagery; to exploring the film as a means of reproducing selected minimal elements of reality in apparent real time; to constructed, ever more complex realities as motion pictures. No one else has ever done quite all that—taken every step along the path with such clarity and precision.

Icons are the result of society's need to venerate, in concrete visual form, its fears, fantasies and superstitions. When they are worshipped, they are sometimes called gods (and sometimes movie stars). They have existed since prehistoric times, and by definition are made in the image of actual objects or persons. They are not synonymous with symbols, in so far as a symbol stands for or represents another thing *different* from the object as itself. Icons, on the other hand, are images copied from life, objects which contain within their physical identity the properties and meanings of all things *like* themselves. They are concentrations of physical reality.

And film, according to Siegfried Kracauer, is 'physical reality redeemed'. Which would seem to tie the two—icons and film—closely together. A number of writers have attacked Kracauer's postulate, inferring that it prescribes a strictly documentary approach to film and so condemns it to reproductions of 'objective reality'. Kracauer never stipulated any such limitation; but he did imply, and correctly I believe, that it is the documentary *quality* of film which underlies its claim to being an art form. The essence of the motion picture is its ability to reproduce what is happening in front of the camera and to convince the viewer that it is 'real'.

Since icons are drawn from reality, it is obvious that, if the proper choice of photographic or film subject is made, it should be possible to create icons within the motion picture medium. I do not know how to make that choice. But Warhol obviously does. It is only necessary to list briefly the subject matter of his work in painting: Marilyn



Left: Marilyn Monroe. The Tate Gallery, London. Right: 'Screen Test No. 2' (Mario Montez). Photograph reproduced courtesy of Peter Gidal from his book *'Andy Warhol—Films and Paintings'*

Monroe, Jackie Kennedy, the Atomic Bomb, mass produced consumables such as Coca Cola bottles and soup cans, auto crashes, race riots, Superman, baseball, Nelson Rockefeller, Elizabeth Taylor, Elvis Presley, the FBI's Thirteen Most Wanted Men, Marlon Brando, and the almighty U.S. dollar.

Warhol had been doing commercial work since his graduation from the Carnegie Institute in 1949. Within two years of his arrival as a 'serious' artist, in 1960, he realised that his original medium, paint, was limiting his ability to make icons (as far as I know he's never even used the word), simply because it could not cope with the problem of communicating the essence of a subject which greatly fascinated him. 'People,' he said. 'People are so fantastic, you can't take a bad picture.' I think he realised, while doing the silkscreen paintings of Elvis, Marilyn and others, that the motion picture had instilled the iconic quality of these individuals in people's minds—a quality which he emphasised in his paintings. But there was a vital difference between the soup cans and the Elvisses, etc. He had enshrined the soup cans; his paintings were the iconic images. But he had not enshrined Elvis; that had been done on the movie screen. If one wanted to explore the power of art to make human icons, then film was where it was at; and therefore Warhol headed straight at it.

The early days at the Factory were photographed in excruciating detail with a Polaroid and 35 mm. still camera; but that was not 'real' enough for Warhol, because the still camera freezes time. So his first films, such as *Empire*, *Kiss* and *Sleep*, explored apparent real time on film. But even there Warhol the editor was at work reshaping reality. *Sleep*, for instance, is not the continuous record of a man's slumbers that it appears to be, but a series of ten-minute segments shot over a period of six weeks and then edited together, as Warhol put it, 'to make a better design.' *Eating*, in which it took forty minutes to consume a mushroom, was a deliberate extension of real time: Warhol told his actor to move as slowly as possible, 'so you have a chance to think

about everything.' Almost the only early film which he did not manipulate was *Empire*, the eight-hour static shot of a night in the life of the Empire State Building. And the reason for this, according to Warhol, was that 'the Empire State Building is a star.' It is also an iconic monument: the first of the super-skyscrapers.

Both Warhol and his film-making shadow, Paul Morrissey, who photographed most of the films Warhol has released from 1965 onward, are obsessed by stars. In the early 1960s, while Lichtenstein was painting anonymous comic-strip like figures, Warhol was portraying a star—Dick Tracy. Their monthly film newspaper, *InterVIEW*, devotes most of its picture space to studio photographs of such luminaries as Elvis Presley, Peter O'Toole, James Dean, Clark Gable, Rita Hayworth and Mick Jagger. In fifteen months of *InterVIEW*'s existence, the only Warhol star to make the cover was Jane Forth.\* Morrissey believes that the decline of the traditional star system is responsible for the doldrums of the American film industry. And Warhol himself says, 'I love Los Angeles. I love Hollywood. They're beautiful. Everybody's plastic.'

'I guess people thought we were silly,' Warhol says, 'but we weren't. We were serious.' Morrissey says not: 'Andy's always avoided taking any serious positions.' What this amounts to is that although everybody is using the same words, nobody is talking about the same thing. Warhol is not being silly about loving plastic people; they are the part of an admittedly plastic society he likes best. Morrissey is likewise correct; Warhol does not take serious positions, because it is not necessary for him to do so. Try as they might, and despite the expenditure of millions of dollars, the most serious-minded film-makers in the world have not

been able to make as chilling an indictment of narcotics addiction as Warhol did in producing *Trash*, which Paul Morrissey photographed and directed. They didn't even have to get 'serious' to do it. John Wilcock has written, 'Andy makes such movies with the same unruffled objectivity that he looks at life.' And in making films like *Trash* and the recent *P.I.G.*, which he shot himself, he is looking at life. His selected, edited and reconstructed version.

At this juncture, it might be tempting to get into a discussion of what constitutes 'life' for Warhol and the Factory. There are psychotherapists I know who are sick with envy over the extraordinary human raw material Warhol has managed to corral; and there are others who regard the entire works as absolutely worthless. But that is as much a trap as trying to find out who Warhol is. He has stated that he is his work, and what we are after is what exactly that means in terms of filmic technique.

He is self-taught on a motion picture camera, and regards the camera exactly as he did the tools of a painter, as a mechanical means to an end, but a means with certain built-in characteristics. He has noted that in newsreels and other forms of documentary film where the cameraman is concerned almost entirely with content, these characteristics become very apparent. Lenses go in and out of focus; exposure is not always precisely correct; framing wanders; shots may be held too long or not long enough.

Warhol and Morrissey both feel that to retain this quality of technical improvisation adds to a film's believability—a conviction shared by many film-makers who have seen what Warhol can do with apparent technical carelessness. But none of it is careless, just as none of the films he has done is accidental. The length, style, design and net result of every movie he has released is deliberate. And this alone sets him apart from most of the so-called 'underground' film-makers, whose movies frequently display extraordinary variations in visual quality, pacing and clarity of communication from one minute to the next. All Warhol's films are stylistic entities; no matter how simple (*Empire*) or complex (*Chelsea Girls*, *Trash*) they never veer from a consistent pace, story, technique

\*It is sometimes contended that Warhol 'created' his superstars, Viva, Ultra Violet, Taylor Mead, etc. This, I think, misses the point. Most, if not all, of Warhol's stars were well known in the East Village New York underground before he filmed them, and many had already appeared in off-off-Broadway revues or other people's films. But it was not until Warhol, maker of icons, featured them that they became iconic images.



Left: 'Lonesome Cowboys'. Right: stars and superstars, Joe Dallesandro in front of Warhol's Brando

and point of view. The strobe cut technique of *Lonesome Cowboys* was a laboriously worked out effect produced by deliberately starting and stopping the camera at given points during the shooting of a scene. Morrissey deliberately threw the zoom lens out of focus in *Trash*, and *Chelsea Girls* was lit and developed for the harshest contrast obtainable. On the subject of 'amateurism', it's perhaps worth noting that Warhol's much-maligned Factory, a tinfoil roofed studio, utilises a type of semi-reflected lighting which a number of very professional cameramen, including Ghislain Cloquet, have seen fit to construct on their own productions.

Warhol has, as Viva put it, the seemingly aimless technique of 'just putting you out there in front of the camera with nothing to do.' He did that to her in one scene from *Lonesome Cowboys*. But unbeknownst to her, the rest of the cast had been coaxed into staging a gang rape scene to 'punish her for being so temperamental.' And they did it, stripping her naked while the camera rolled. Almost nothing Warhol does in his work is aimless. His films represent constant experiment, in which technique is directed to reinforcing content. To him, the camera is part of the medium, sometimes tediously so; but it is never the star.

In the *Blue Movie* sequence where Viva and Louis Waldon talk and make love, Warhol's camera does not budge. The lens does not zoom from a static medium shot position; focus is perfect; there are no cuts. The audience's undivided attention is focused on the content of the scene. In today's almost totally alienated urban society, the simple act of a man and woman breaking through mental defences, and the mechanical presence of the camera, to feel free to respond to one another assumes a quality which transcends the incident. We recognise in their very real nervousness, shyness and gallant attempts to overcome their inhibitions, some of our own social plights. In that sense, their act does, I think, assume an iconic quality.

Warhol casts to character and lets his performers make up their own lines to fit basic story requirements. But it is his aim to avoid creating wholly fictional persons,

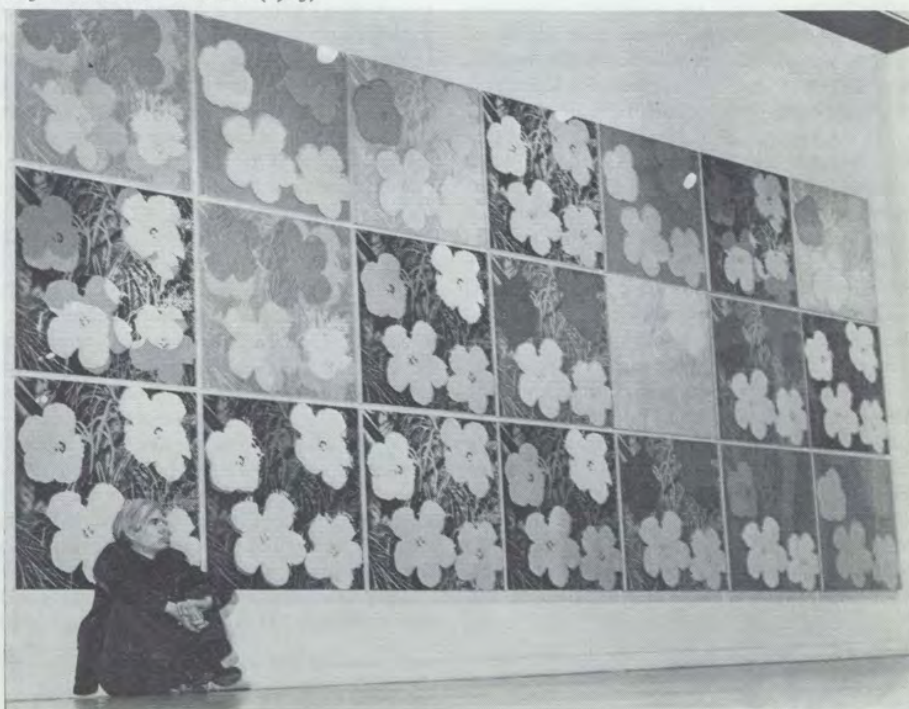
and I think this has to do with his life-long insistence on confronting reality. Just as he might have painted fictitiously labelled cans instead of Campbell's Soup cans, or anonymous bottles instead of Coke bottles, Warhol could have used ordinary actors and given them scripted dialogue. However, if his painted objects had been entirely fictitious, they could not have been icons, and I believe exactly the same principle applies to his films. Every one of his performers projects an utterly genuine quality which Warhol does everything he can to reinforce. And it is in that quality that much of their iconic character lies. The rest is in the subject matter of the films themselves.

It is here, I think, that Warhol separates himself from the reproduction of direct reality in film, just as he did in painting. His stories bear the same relationship to his characters that his canvases had to their content. Five hundred Coke bottles in one painting? Three gun-shooting Elvises? A garishly yellow-haired Marilyn? A magenta

electric chair? Yes, all those. And they fit perfectly with transvestite cowboys and a Women's Lib group made up entirely of female impersonators. In every case, Warhol has enlarged upon life.

In summary, he recognised, some twelve years ago, that there exists for our society a gallery of ever-changing iconic realities which represent the nightmares, if you will, of millions. He isolated and magnified images of these realities, and by 'letting the resultant thing itself speak for itself' (to quote Jonas Mekas) presented them in a way that forced belief in them as inescapable truths. He brought this aesthetic to film, first in quite simple form and now—as Paul Morrissey takes over actual direction for Andy Warhol Films Inc.—in somewhat more complex and, some claim, diluted fashion. It is said that Warhol's personal interest in film is now diminishing. Or is it? 'Well,' he said, when told the gist of comments about his cinematic demise, 'we're going to start making serious movies.' ■

Andy Warhol with 'Flowers' (1965)



# Capra counts his Oscars

Elliott Stein

Frank Capra's *The Name Above the Title*\* is dedicated to Aristotle, Harry Cohn, Harry Langdon, Leonardo da Vinci, Lionel Barrymore, Jean Harlow, Athanasius, Sam Briskin. . . Alack, this disarming page precedes five hundred others, many of which shed a dim afterglow on one of the more exemplary careers in American cinema.

The first reels make for a brash, archetypal Horatio Alger story: the celebration of Capra's sixth birthday with a chorus of immigrants in the steerage of the boat bringing his Sicilian family to the Land of Promise; the Death of the Father; World War I; Odd Jobs—Con Man, On the Bum in the Southwest, hustling poker games and selling wildcat oil stock. At 25, Capra proclaims he is from Hollywood and bluffs his way into directing a San Francisco film, *Fulah Fisher's Boarding House*. More odd jobs: prop boy, cutter, finally gag man for Sennett. The first decisive phase: gagging and directing three pictures with Harry Langdon. The feud with Langdon.

A great turning point arrived with a call from Harry Cohn ('His Crudeness') who had been studying an alphabetical list of unemployed directors; Capra's name was at the top. Here began the long hate-love affair between these two stubborn characters which lasted eleven years and 25 films. Capra would emerge as one of the world's top directors; his rise would take Columbia from Poverty Row to Major Boulevard.

*It Happened One Night* inspires a fine gossip chapter. ('Bad Boy' Gable had been loaned by L. B. Mayer to Cohn as a punishment for misbehaving, and arrived at Columbia drunk and hostile at this exile to 'Siberia'. When the film walked off with five Oscars, MGM was obliged to triple his salary.) Part I is certainly the least incoherent section of the book: other absorbing bits and pieces—Capra's ideas on pace, the wild and woolly production difficulties while shooting *Dirigible*, how he took a sullen, camera-shy girl, discovered a way to utilise her 'vital technical lack' and made a star of Barbara Stanwyck in *Ladies of Leisure*. Stanwyck apparently gave her all the first time she tried a scene, even in a rehearsal (she was unusable in retakes). Her director, therefore, did not allow her to rehearse and



'The Bitter Tea of General Yen': Capra on the set, with Nils Asther, Barbara Stanwyck, Walter Connolly

all of her key scenes were shot in long single takes with several cameras rolling.

If *It Happened One Night* proved a tremendous sleeper in America, Capra's world reputation is based on the sentimental fables which glorify the 'little man', and which were ushered in by *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*. It is obvious that something crucial happened to Capra's creativity between 1932 (the year of *American Madness*, a brilliant *tour de force* whose pictorial qualities fortunately submerge its proto-Deedsian message) and 1935. Whatever it was—maturity, inspiration, trauma, or 'once a con man, always a con man'—you pays your money and you makes your Ten Best list. For mine, after *Mr. Deeds*, he would never again be capable of a film as funny as *The Strong Man*, as lovable as *It Happened One Night*, as charming as *Rain or Shine*, as tastefully erotic as *Platinum Blonde*, as great as *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (his only major film without a happy ending, it lost money; and the lesson stuck), or simply as exciting as *Dirigible*. A lovely, luminescent light touch was gone forever; more had been lost than gained, *pace* official histories of the cinema, which ignore nearly all the earlier works. With the arrival of *Mr. Deeds* (1936), inaugurating the great decade of Capramania, only Alistair Cooke seems to have perceived the danger signals. Cooke confessed to '... an uneasy feeling he's on his way out. He's started to make movies about themes instead of about people.'

Smith, Deeds, Doe and Co. were universally hailed for their jolly libertarian New Dealism; but this judgment seems way off base today. (Capra was not a Democrat—not even after an impressive meeting with Roosevelt, at the time of *Prelude to War*, when the President lived up to a build-up as great as the Grand Canyon: 'Meeting with FDR is like seeing the Big Hole for the first time—you feel puny'.)

In retrospect, these 'fantasies of goodwill'†, which at no point conflict with

middle-class American status quo values, appear as shrewdly commercial manipulative tracts. Their philistine-populist notions and greeting-card sentiments (a New Deal was hardly required—all social and political ills would melt if one good John stuck to his guns) are not far removed from the simplisms of such bottom-of-the-cracker-barrel movements as *Qualunquismo* in Italy and *Poujadisme* in France. ('I knew that filmgoers did not see my films just for... entertainment. They came ahungering for soul food. "God loves you, little man. Hang in there." Without that spiritual meat my films were just... blue-plate specials.') Capra's favourite film of all ('Better yet, I thought it was the greatest film anybody ever made') is *It's a Wonderful Life*. Its spiritual meat is that the only thing wrong with capitalism is Lionel Barrymore.

What *did* happen to Capra around 1935, fracturing his long career into two parts so distinct that it might well be called the year of the great aesthetic fault? An official answer is given for the first time in *The Name Above the Title*, and it is, of all things—a bald pixie.

After achieving the Oscar for *It Happened One Night*, thereby 'scaling the Mount Everest of Filmlandia', what could he do for an encore? This realisation of his greatest goal (Oscar obsession is one of the book's grating leitmotifs) literally made him sick. He developed 'psychosomatic tuberculosis'. The only outsider allowed in his bedroom was Max Winslow, a song publisher friend of Irving Berlin, who hummed Berlin's latest tunes to the moribund director. Capra really seemed to be dying, when one day Winslow entered with a visitor (p. 176). A mysterious bald gentleman with thick glasses who did not introduce himself approached the bed, and without preamble called Capra a coward—an offence to God. Suddenly Hitler's voice came over the radio. The visitor continued:

'That evil man is desperately trying to poison the world with hate... You sir, you can talk to hundreds of millions...'

\**The Name Above the Title: An Autobiography*. By Frank Capra. (The Macmillan Company, New York. \$12.50)

†Richard Griffith's apt coinage.

The talents you have are not your own... they are His gifts to you... and when you don't use the gifts God blessed you with—you are an offence to God and to humanity.'

The author adds: 'The little faceless man walked out of the room... in less than thirty seconds he had ripped me open with the truth: exposed the fetid pus of my vanities.'

The expiring Capra leapt into his underwear, drove down to Palm Springs and recovered, signed a new contract with Harry Cohn, witnessed the birth of his second child, little John, who promptly cried out at delivery: 'I am! I am! Unique, individual; a miracle born of time and stardust. Gangway world!', read and re-read Tolstoi, Dostoevsky and Clarence Buddington Kelland, decided to use God's gift to tell 'simple tales about the Johns and the Henrys and the Harriets' of the world, and 'became a subscriber to one of America's great newspapers, the *Christian Science Monitor*.'

The admonitory pixie was never identified or seen again. The world gained Smith, Doe and Shangri-La (several hundred reels of superb acting, treacle, uplift and unrestrainedly happy endings), but lost forever was a unique directorial talent for dapper melodrama and gracious sexuality. Stanwyck, for instance, stunningly physical in *Bitter Tea*, is, in *John Doe*, only slightly less sensual than Walter Brennan; Gary Cooper, a model of virile glamour in pre-*Deeds* days, was with Capra's tutelage, transformed into a faltering nanny in *Deeds* and *Doe*.

The book is blotched with errors; Capra's slapdash researching of his own career is truly awesome. He has made no feature since *A Pocketful of Miracles* in 1961. (Of all his later projects which did not get off the ground, the most memorable would surely have been a life of St. Paul starring Frank Sinatra.) In retirement he has been working on his memoirs and granting few interviews—the reason was that it would all

be in his autobiography. It isn't. Moreover, the book is written in a style which would do no great credit to *Variety's* dustbin; in the last section, one catches sight of the underbelly of the 'fantasies of goodwill'. It is not pretty. The planet seems to have been going to hell ever since Frank Capra lost complete control over his films.

Towards the end, Capra is describing a period when he was filming less, and with less success (the failure of *A Pocketful of Miracles* is laid at the door of Glenn Ford):

'Judging by contemporary Hollywood films, the United States was made up of sexpots, homosexuals, lesbians, Marquis de Sades, junkies... Forgotten... were the hard-working stiff that came home too tired to shout or demonstrate in the streets—steel workers, bus drivers, salesmen... who paid their bills and taxes, and prayed they'd have enough left over to keep their kids in college, despite their knowing that some were pot-smoking, parasitic parent-haters... In England, the homosexuals minced across the screen and waved their hankies at the audience. So few real actors could get work, Peter Sellers had to play all the parts... When *Pocketful* came up empty there was dancing in the streets among the disciples of lewdness and violence. Sentiment was dead, they cried... Viva hard-core brutality... The winds of change blew through the dream factories of make-believe, tore at its crinoline tatters... But the hedonists, the homosexuals, the hemophilic bleeding hearts, the God-haters, all cried: "Shake 'em! Rattle 'em!... Long live Pleasure! Nudity? Yea! Wife-swapping? Yea! Liberate the world from prudery! Emancipate our films from morality!" To which films like *Pocketful of Miracles* answered: No! We must never emancipate our films from morality. Morality gained us our freedom. Abandon morals and we turn back the clock!'

If *Pocketful of Miracles* has something to say to us about morality gaining freedom, then *Take Me Out to The Ball Game* is the memorable life story of Sören Kierkegaard. *Pocketful of Miracles* is a witless fairy tale which concerns the efforts of Broadway

bootleggers to dress up derelict Apple Annie (Bette Davis) as a rich married society woman so that her illegitimate daughter may wed the son of a Spanish nobleman. When this hoax is perpetrated, the gangsters are so moved at the sight of bogus wealth and phoney respectability creating happiness that they all go 'straight'. The assumptions of this repulsive film are, if anything, tackier and more deeply immoral than those of the current sexploitors Capra deplores. We are soon to be gifted with a Ross Hunter musical remake of *Lost Horizon*; it should be apparent from the above excerpts that if Shangri-La were being brought up to date by Capra himself these days, an obvious choice for Minister of Culture would be Spiro Agnew.

It is poignant that an artist of Capra's stature is so self-righteously soured, out of pulse with vibrations beyond his ken in the world at large. Yes, he is no longer young; yes, the universe of several of his films is already period bric-à-brac. What is really depressing is that he also seems alien to much of the best that world cinema is still capable of producing. When recently asked his opinion of Ingmar Bergman, he replied: 'I just don't know what the hell he's after.'

It is more important to have made *The Strong Man* than to be wrong, forty-five years later, about the presence of Mary Astor in it; a handful of minor errors of this nature in a book of this size would be par for the course. *The Name Above the Title* is, however, selling for \$12.50, highly touted as a book of the Month Club Selection, and has been critically acclaimed in many quarters as one of the greatest, most informative books ever written about the movies. It is far from that. Fantasies of goodwill die hard.

Many of the errors (*Lost Horizon* did not open at Radio City), mislabelled photos (on p.20 the youth Baldwin M. Baldwin is not Lucky Baldwin of Comstock Lode fame, unless Capra was tutoring a remarkably well-preserved nonagenarian in maths), jumbled film titles, etc., will only anguish cine-fanatics. Others are graver. With disquieting regularity, we are treated to total recall of long conversations held decades ago, dialogued with contemporary slang. And in spite of the book's length, matters of the greatest interest are touched upon, only to float away, uncompleted, lost in fogs of verbiage. Thus, in the chapter entitled 'Burn the First Two Reels', we learn that, after a disastrous preview, Capra 'saved' *Lost Horizon* by literally burning its first two reels. It would have been fascinating for anyone who seriously cares about Capra's work to learn in some detail just what was scrapped. For these reels involved the burning of Baskul, perhaps the greatest action sequence the man filmed.

Joe Walker served as director of photography on twenty of Capra's films, from *That Certain Thing* in 1928 until *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), a period encompassing all the important years at Columbia. Although Walker's name pops up here and there in passing, we are graced with an ungenerously skimpy amount of real information concerning his contribution to the quality of many of Capra's films. The case made for Harry Langdon's skid to ruin once he stopped taking direction from Capra

'American Madness'





'It Happened One Night': Clark Gable, Claudette Colbert

is unconvincing; Langdon was one of the great comics, and whatever help he may have had from others in fashioning his *personnage*, he later turned out some very acceptable films on his own hook. Some passages are both erroneous and misleading:

'It was probably Spingold's literate and tasteful exploitation of *Lost Horizon* that finally put Poverty Row on the map. It also brought to the attention of the world's film buffs the emerging fact that there were now two distinct film-making methods in Hollywood: Columbia's producer-director way, pioneered by Capra; and the committee way of the major studios, pioneered by L. B. Mayer. In short, the individual versus the committee, or, in personal terms, Capra versus Mayer. And, because my way had produced five home runs in a row, other committee-hating directors were attracted to Columbia, namely John Ford, Leo McCarey, and George Stevens. So while many fine directors contracted to major studios still remained anonymous under the committee system, Cohn was assembling a powerhouse of much-talked-about independent producer-directors who turned out such hits for him as *The Whole Town's Talking*, *The More the Merrier*, *Love Affair*... Cohn's star was rising fast, and fellow directors began calling me the director's director.'

The World's Film Buffs of 1937 Ltd. are unlikely to vote a motion of thanks to Nate Spingold at their next meeting—they knew less about the above labyrinthine Ways, way back then, than about Swann's or Guermante's, and cared even less. Those surviving might care to compare Capra's solipsistic reveries with a passage in Bob Thomas' well-documented and generally reliable *King Cohn*: 'After the defection of Capra, Harry Cohn was desperate to prove that Columbia's fortunes were not dependent on one brilliant director. He sought others to fill the void, among them Leo McCarey.' Thomas also notes that: 'While working on *The Awful Truth* for Columbia, McCarey was informed by Cohn: "I hired you to make a great comedy so I could show up Frank Capra."' *The Awful Truth* got McCarey an Oscar, but he would never work

for Cohn again, although the studio head wanted to sign him for a long-term contract. He 'turned out' *Love Affair* not for Cohn, but at RKO, where he'd be free from the likes of Cohn—and Columbia's way.

When the book was published some months ago, New York's Museum of Modern Art promulgated Frank Capra Day, screened four films, and topped it all off with a cocktail party. One of the films was *Flight*. Little has been written on this exciting, jingoistic early sound action picture, so the Museum quite naturally excerpted the passage concerning it from *The Name Above the Title* for use in programme notes. One sat down and read: 'We had no process shots then, no trick photography in which actors are photographed in studio planes against aerial backgrounds. We got our air shots the hard way...' Then the lights dimmed and one looked up at *Flight*—and blinked. The film is full of scenes of miniature planes taking off, miniature planes crashing in trick tabletop shots, as Jack Holt and other staunch Marines bomb the hell out of hundreds of scrubby Nicaraguan rebel 'greasers'. No process shots then? They can be seen in Tod Browning's silent *Where East is East*, made before *Flight*. They could even be seen a quarter of a century before that, in Norman O. Dawn's *The Drifter* (1913). Process photography was not merely already in use at the time of *Flight*; the name was widely known to the general public. Witness the opening line of principal advertising for Howard Hughes' *Hell's Angels*, whose aerial footage was shot in the same year: 'For the first time in film history a colossal spectacle is presented without process shots.'

Later in the day, I questioned Capra about the passage in the book which bothered me the most. In 1937, after a trip to London for the English premiere of *Lost Horizon*, he goes to Russia, expecting to see Eisenstein. The creator of *Potemkin* is nowhere to be found. Questions bring vague answers... 'He is not well... in Kiev... nobody has seen him.' Finally, he receives a furtive message to make haste to a broken-

down Georgian café, where he meets Eisenstein, who complains bitterly of his troubles with *Ivan the Terrible*. 'I make Part One; Kremlin bosses see it—they give me big medal. Good. Soviet hero! I make Part Two; big shots see it—they take back medal. Stalin say no Part Three, no more films; say I make political mistake. Soviet bum! Three months now I'm in doghouse. You like?'

What can one make of this conversation with what sounds like a demented Apache chief? A chapter later, back in Hollywood, Capra relates a new tussle with Cohn: 'No phone calls. Did that make me a pariah—like Eisenstein in Moscow? One word from Stalin had put Eisenstein in the doghouse. Evidently, one word from Cohn had branded me an "untouchable" to all other studios.'

Could Capra have daydreamed the conversation simply to plant a not so *bon mot* a chapter later comparing Harry Cohn to Stalin? I took the plunge: 'Mr. Capra, I'm puzzled by your conversation with Eisenstein concerning *Ivan*. Maybe you confused it with *Bezhin Meadow*? How could he tell you of his troubles with Part II of *Ivan*, when he only started making Part I four or five years after 1937. Were you in Russia during the war?' He replied curtly: 'You have your dates wrong, young man. During the war, you should know, Eisenstein was busy making propaganda—making indoctrination films like I was at the time. *Ivan* was in '37 when I was there. That story's for real!'

A few days after this conversation, Capra dropped in at the Museum's Study Centre and asked if 'there is anything here on Eisenstein'. It would have been simpler for all of us if he had done his homework before writing the book, but I am somewhat relieved that the weird colloquy reported as history on page 209 of *The Name Above the Title* is just another error, not a plot to malign Harry Cohn. The book is of an ilk to encourage such sulky suspicions; what is most desperately, sublimely credible in its pages is the author's preternatural ego. What we now need is a serious, unauthorised study of Capra. This autohagiography will not do. It is doubly distressing: for what it does not reveal about the work, for what it does about the man.

'It's a Wonderful Life': '... the only thing wrong with capitalism is Lionel Barrymore'



# COPYRIGHT AND THE PIRATES



Neville Hunnings

The film distributors in Britain are at present losing half a million pounds a year in unauthorised screenings of pirated, often stolen, prints. The figure goes up to £3-5 million if international freebooting is taken into account. This is obviously big business, and indeed the secretariat of the Kinematograph Renters' Society sometimes seems more like a department of Scotland Yard or Interpol than the sedate group of middlemen one used to imagine.

There are two types of outlet for these contraband prints, and both of them illustrate a general weakening of the efficiency of the traditional film marketing methods, a failure to exploit new and less orthodox screening possibilities or to come to terms with changing social or political situations. The prints themselves are brand new, sometimes not yet even officially released (*Straw Dogs*, *Clockwork Orange*, *Soldier Blue* are recent examples), or else older films with a continuing ordinary commercial life (colour prints of *Gone With the Wind* which cost some £150 from the labs are changing hands on the clandestine market for as much as £1,200). For the most part prints are being imported from the United States, although a substantial number are also being struck in Britain. And they are being shown particularly in the 4,000-odd working men's clubs, a circuit which is amply funded and can afford the high fees of leading pop groups as well as other forms of live entertainment.

The source of the prints seems to be a combination of outright theft and the borrowing of a print for a quick re-print in a clandestine lab; with the emphasis probably on the latter, although it is thought that some of the copies originate in U.S. military installations in Europe. The KRS and MPAA put much hope in a system of print marking, but that will need to be rather sophisticated if it is to catch more than the stolen copies. Even then, the problems of enforcement are great enough, since in spite of the co-operation being given them by the Club and Institute Union, of which most of the working men's clubs are members, it is not always easy for film trade sleuths to gain entrance to the clubs where screening is taking place. Much detective work is consequently needed, and on March 21st, 1972 an injunction was obtained in the High Court against two clandestine 'distributors' of prints requiring them to deliver up all copies they had in their possession and not to exhibit or deal in any of the KRS films.

While the situation in Britain is difficult enough, the export trade position is quite

hopeless, for sporadic customs control can be of little effect on determined film smugglers. The greatest source of foreign customers at present is South Africa, for two reasons. As a result of the general anti-apartheid boycott, the South African government has virtually withdrawn from the Berne Union, in that it has created what approaches a general compulsory licence for much copyright material (in order to beat the boycott by playwrights, composers, etc.). This has had the side effect of destroying the psychological consensus on which the normal copyright licensing system rests. Allied to this is the effect of the stringent censorship laws, creating a situation in which surreptitious viewing of smuggled prints becomes common, and again the general psychological respect for authors' rights is weakened.

But even were the South African loophole to be plugged, there remains a substantial celluloid trail to the third world, particularly the Middle East. And here, the effect of the Stockholm Protocol to the Berne Copyright Convention could have serious

consequences, since it would permit developing countries in certain circumstances to use copyright material without payment of royalty. The Protocol has been strongly resisted by the United Kingdom, among others. If it is not implemented, however, the developing countries have threatened to withdraw altogether from the Berne Union; and that would mean no copyright protection at all in these countries (as in the USA before 1952 and in Russia now).

It has been suggested that changes in the copyright law might help to break up this extremely lucrative traffic, but that is doubtful unless the alterations were to make copyright even more restrictive than it is already. Changes are certainly needed, for the law of film copyright is still in a thorough mess. In the past it did at least seem to meet the needs of the orthodox film trade, even if of no one else; but now it seems that even that has gone.

One change will in any case come into effect next year, which will affect one of the protective devices that the Copyright Act makes available. In its s. 18 the Act entitles a copyright owner (including an exclusive licensee) to claim the physical property in any infringing copy. An infringing copy is not only one which has been made unlawfully but also one which is commercially imported without the authority of the licensee. (This was, for instance, the reason given some years ago by certain booksellers for refusing to order for customers copies of Keaton's *My Wonderful World of Slapstick* from its American publishers.) The effect of s. 18 is to protect the territorial monopoly of the licensee, so that his exclusive right to distribute the film cannot be impaired. (There is a further protection in s. 22, which enables foreign-made copies to be declared prohibited goods and refused customs clearance, but this does not apply to films.) But both sections will be affected by the Common Market rules on competition; for it is quite clear from Community case law that copyright law cannot be used to prevent 'parallel imports'—i.e., the import of lawfully made goods to compete with those being marketed by the exclusive licensee. This will certainly apply to films imported from and into other EEC countries; American prints will be less affected.

But much more fundamental changes will be necessary to meet the needs of the film in present-day society. For a film is no longer merely a means of whiling away a Saturday evening in the local Odeon. Indeed, increasingly, the local Odeon is not showing films any more, even if it has not been pulled down. Large, regular, loyal audiences belong to the past. The market for fiction films is to be found in the ordinary cinemas, in specialised cinemas, in film societies, in social clubs, on ships, in aeroplanes, on television, in schools and universities; overlapping these are the even more specialised outlets for non-fiction films.

Even this does not exhaust the potentialities. The dwelling house which does not have its 8 mm. home movie outfit is likely soon to become a rarity. With projectors

# Film REVIEWS



Necktie victim: Barbara Leigh-Hunt

## Frenzy

Once a Londoner, always a Londoner. Hitchcock's return to home ground, twenty-two years after *Stage Fright*, is a remarkable performance in most senses of the word; and not least because the journey from California has in effect been made through time as well as space. Hitchcock's London in *Frenzy* (Rank) remains the same old city in which Sylvia Sidney did for Oscar Homolka with the knife that had been carving the joint, and Peter Lorre held Nova Pilbeam hostage. It's almost a shock when the man on the run finds shelter in the Hilton Hotel, which clearly has no right to be there at all; and it's a shrewd Hitchcockian move, for other than essential plot purposes, to make the main setting Covent Garden, one of the few areas still awaiting the developer.

At the start of the film, a smooth, spruce gentleman is addressing a gathering on the Embankment (Hitchcock, decorously attentive, is in the crowd) on the new cleanliness of the river. A girl's naked body, a piece of all too solid pollution, drifts in with the tide; another victim, as the onlookers obligingly exclaim, of 'the necktie murderer', one of those Ripperish slaughterers who provide instant London folklore. To sustain the antiquated mood, a uniformed bobby is soon telling us (and the murderer) that 'this necktie fellow is giving them a bit of a headache', and two gentlemen in a pub are overheard in a stagey conversation about the odd ways of sexual psychopaths. Skulking in a corner is the obvious, innocent suspect, Blaney (Jon Finch), a bad-tempered ex-RAF officer now fallen on hard times, wearing a tie as ostentatious as a cutlet frill.

It must, presumably, have given Hitchcock a good deal of quiet fun to begin the picture on a note that can only be described as archaic. He's back home, and nothing has changed, including the clichés which pile up like Covent Garden Brussels sprouts at most points in Anthony Shaffer's distinctly laboured screenplay. By any standards, including those of parody, the early scenes of *Frenzy* are over-stuffed with heavily explanatory dialogue.

Part of the wry Hitchcockian charm, however, is the way the shooting tactic acts as a guide to the director's own areas of interest in the picture. On the face of it, *Frenzy* (which started

life as Arthur La Bern's novel *Goodbye Piccadilly, Farewell Leicester Square*) is pretty familiar stuff. Perversely, the necktie killer, a Covent Garden fruiterer named Rusk (Barry Foster), selects his old friend Blaney's divorced wife as his next victim. Blaney, under heavy suspicion, takes to his heels with his barmaid girl friend (Anna Massey), who injudiciously returns to the Market just in time to be snapped up by the busy Rusk. Blaney is innocent but boringly sullen; the more interesting Rusk a smiling, brassy-haired sadist. Even the two men's friendship and its multiple betrayals, which Hitchcockians such as Chabrol or Truffaut would possibly have seen as the true centre of the film, is here allowed to amount to little more than a device to bring the two ends of the plot together.

What attracted Hitchcock would hardly seem to have been the old 'transference' theme, although Blaney does end up hunting Rusk with a piece of lead piping, or the variation on the notion of the wronged and wrong man. One would guess that he made the picture for the sake of one murder scene, one extraordinary postscript to a murder, and a couple of waywardly comical episodes from the home life of his detective. The cement that holds the bricks in place is provided by the return trip to his lost London of the 1930s; and perhaps by that Hitchcockian trait, more marked now that he is no longer using star players, of casting a cold eye on all his characters. Babs the barmaid is at least as innocent a victim as the schoolteacher in *The Birds*, but her essential role in the film is that of corpse, a slice of very cold meat. Little sympathy is spent on her alive; and Anna

Massey, who is well capable of softer things, was presumably directed to play as though she were anticipating her chilly end.

The first killing, of Blaney's ex-wife, is a bizarre affair, a montage murder like something out of *Blackmail*, all cuts and strangling fragments. At the outset, the murderer's hand inevitably comes down on the telephone as the victim feebly tries to dial; and at the end the killer walks out of the shot, casually chewing an apple, as Mrs. Blaney's secretary trips up the street from the other direction. Once she has gone into the building, Hitchcock holds the camera impassively on the quiet street corner, a countdown shot to show just how long he can keep his public waiting for a scream.

But if this is a wink-tipping trick, the steady Hitchcock hand turns it to rarer effect later in the picture. The barmaid's murder must take place off-screen, to make its sequel tolerable, and the scene in which she's lured inside the killer's flat (the premises of Duckworth, the publishers, have been borrowed for the purpose) ends with the camera moving slowly, smoothly, irrevocably, back and back, out and across the street. This shot is simply superb; and also very Hitchcockian—a kind of built-in criticism of the earlier, easy trick of the long wait, and our own gullibility in falling for it.

Hitchcock has always known that his public can be made to identify with *anyone*: killer or victim, detective or suspect, audience allegiances are conditioned by the angle of vision and the impersonal forces of suspense. The grotesque central sequence in *Frenzy* finds the murderer riding in the back of a moving lorry, wrestling with the lumpish potato sack in which he has stowed his victim, in a demented effort to recover the betraying piece of evidence still clutched in the dead hand. Surrealistically, the girl's naked foot peeps out from among the potatoes, like some obscene vegetable growth; appallingly, he smashes the stiffened fingers to rescue his trophy. One has very little real doubt that it was essentially for this sequence that Hitchcock decided to film *Frenzy*; and to demonstrate that during this struggle with rolling potatoes and frozen limbs, the audience must positively side not with the corpse, the innocent lorry-driver, or even the potatoes, but with the obsessed creature at his ludicrously ghoulish task.

The killer gets away: the sequence ends

'Frenzy': Rusk (Barry Foster) with potato sack



impudently, with the corpse rolling out of the jolting lorry right in front of a police car. That, Hitchcock might be saying, is that: the body, having served his turn, now belongs to the law. And the third element in *Frenzy's* triangular construction is in fact provided by the law, in the person of Inspector Oxford (Alec McCowen) and his wife, Mrs. Oxford—the superb Vivien Merchant—flows between kitchen and dining-room, serving up alarming Cordon Bleu dishes and chatting breathlessly about her husband's case. The snapping of a finger is echoed with insolent precision in the snapping of a breadstick; the dead stare of a murdered girl in the fish eye glooming among the debris in the Inspector's soup plate. One of *Frenzy's* main topics is the difficulty of disposing of dead matter—food and corpses and clues. And at the end, the undertaker is still making jokes. Rusk is trapped with another dead girl on his premises; and enters hauling a vast trunk, of a kind rarely seen these days anywhere. Presumably, true to the manner of the 1930s murderer, he had intended to leave his problem in the hands of the railways.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

## The Ceremony

In the early 1930s, Japan created a puppet state, Manchukuo, on Chinese territory. Twelve years later, in accepting the Potsdam Declaration, Japan acknowledged defeat in her war with the Allies and relinquished her colonial territories. Some six and a half million Japanese expatriates flowed back into the country and were informed by their emperor that he no longer claimed to be their divinely appointed spiritual leader. In effect, the head of the Japanese family, traditionally the symbol of unquestioned wisdom and authority, had abdicated. For many Japanese, this unimaginable disgrace was interpreted as being the direct consequence of the pre-war Manchurian policy; in reaction against imperialism, the country devoted itself to an energetic process of democratisation and attempted in the space of a few months to find an alternative to the social structure that had existed for centuries. The Japanese returning from the empire's outposts thus found themselves at a double disadvantage: not only were their customs foreign and outdated, but also they personally were unpopular as symbols of a despicable past. Six and a half million people, including many who came by way of Communist indoctrination in Siberia, were forced to insinuate themselves into a country that was certain only that they were unwelcome.

Such is the story of Nagisa Oshima's *The Ceremony* (Academy/Connoisseur), the film to which he gave the shooting title *Japan and the Japanese*. It is a study of post-war Japan over twenty-five years, done not as an epic or a documentary but with Oshima's characteristic simplicity as a domestic drama—delicate, personal, tragic and sentimental, an allegory that mirrors an infinite vista of further lives. Oshima was himself born in 1932, spent his childhood in the glow of national pride and his adolescence in the murk of national disgust. It's reasonable to suppose that his identification with the narrator of *The Ceremony*, Masuo (the name means 'Man of Manchuria'), is extremely close. Yet the narrative of the film, miraculously, is complex only in the sense that the relationship between its characters is hinted at rather than defined, that the motives for what they do are left to be guessed at rather than explained. Like post-war Japan, the Sakurada family is in a ferocious struggle with itself, but the struggle is only definable in terms of historical dates like points on a graph which indicate the trends between. In the history of country and family alike, these points are marked by ceremonies—the weddings and the funerals for which the adversaries come



'The Ceremony': '... non-consummation in a coffin'

together and realign their policies, their allegiances and their beliefs.

The film therefore deals not with one ceremony but with many, even while its title confirms that they are all the same. Oshima is a man of ritual, his films returning obsessively to a single act, be it criminal (*Boy*), sexual (*Shinjuku Thief*), or judicial (*Death by Hanging*). The act is perpetually a public one, witnessed and evaluated by a form of tribunal which, like the Japanese nation, seeks to derive from it some clue as to new and acceptable forms of conduct. And the act is performed by the young rather than the old, for the old have performed their ritual and it has failed them, the paradox being that the demonstration has nevertheless been essential so that the young can take what they need from it.

Oshima's series of family events in *The Ceremony* are accordingly tableaux of assessment prompted by the (gradually merging) human necessities of marriage and death. As the distance since the end of the war increases, these encounters become more and more bizarre, until a marriage takes place without the bride and its non-consummation takes place in a coffin. From such anarchy, the only retreat is into the safety of tradition. The film ends with a total fusion of love and death, the 'bride' tying her own wrists and ankles with demure silk before taking poison like a Communion wafer and lying placidly beside the disembowelled bridegroom. It's an image from the imperial past, deliberately filmed in formalised setting and colours; and it's a similar gesture to that of Yukio Mishima, whose suicide in 1970 was also a renunciation of the direction in which Japan had strayed since the war. (Oshima wrote in the *Tokyo Journal* that he was greatly shocked by Mishima's death.) Its witness is Masuo, the man from Manchuria, for whom it confirms the total loss of everything he held dear.

All this may at first sight seem impenetrably foreign to audiences other than Japanese. But although a certain amount of homework undoubtedly helps to clarify, for instance, the significance of baseball in the Japanese democratic process, or the special resonance of the wedding songs in which new words are made to fit ancient melodies, *The Ceremony* need in no way be shrugged off as an essay in obscure and alien politics. Oshima's achievement has been again to transform a national agony into an international concern—as indeed he was bound to do: 'I feel that unless we can make clear the

secret of the spirit of the Japanese, who are in a hurry to live and a hurry to die, Japan will soon be led to war again.' The film's final image shows Masuo gripping the baseball that represents his later life (his democratic existence) while pushing his face to the ground in the despairing gesture that evokes his infancy (his imperial existence), and the baby brother who was buried alive in Manchuria like a potent claim of military superiority. Poised between the two in a trance, just as he is poised between land and sea, he waits for someone else to decide his fate; dominated for too long by his grandfather, he has neither the will nor the ability to assume the role of the old man's successor.

In one of the most beautiful scenes of the film—and there are many that are exquisite—the Sakurada family stands motionless around the body of an aunt whose love has been shared by three generations. The sword through her heart pins her upright to a tree. The splendour of this silent group, beside which the camera gently circles, is shockingly betrayed when one of the onlookers wrenches the sword free and two bright jets of blood leap from the corpse as it sinks to the ground. Ozu could have supplied the devoted members of the family. Mizoguchi could have supplied the elegant camera movement. Only Oshima could have added the blood.

PHILIP STRICK

## Cabaret

There hasn't been a more electric opening since Saul Bass dreamed up that stealthily prowling cat for *Walk on the Wild Side*. As the credits for *Cabaret* (Cinerama) unfold against a jet black screen, mysterious hints of light and sound gradually kindle it, with the magic of the moment in *Funny Face* where Audrey Hepburn's face materialises out of the darkness, into the bustle of a cabaret preparing to come alive. A single drumroll. Then the spotlight face of the M.C. (Joel Grey), grotesquely painted into a leering mask of corruption, launches into the brilliant opening number, 'Willkommen'.

As one settles back to enjoyment, however, one becomes uncomfortably aware of a nudging insistence in Bob Fosse's direction, which is clearly determined to point a moral. One might perhaps forgive the camera for turning away from Joel Grey and his hideously meaty chorus-

girls to record items of significance in the audience, a Lesbian with a Holly Golightly cigarette-holder, a lecherously bloated businessman, a fresh-faced youth with a Nazi armband. One might even forgive the cut-ins of a busy railway station as Herr Issyvo (here unaccountably renamed Brian, but rather well played by Michael York) arrives as an English innocent in the Berlin of 1931. But what of the *cinéma-vérité* shots of stolid German citizens, hurrying about their business along contemporary German streets and matching oddly with the expressionistic, Blue Angel world of the cabaret?

'I am a camera with its shutter open,' wrote Isherwood by way of introduction to his Berlin stories, 'quite passive, recording, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed.' That day, alas, has come with *Cabaret*, where someone has decided to abandon John Kander's delightful stage musical (and with it both the *I Am a Camera* play and the film) to go back to Isherwood for some real dramatic meat. Unfortunately, the whole point of *Goodbye to Berlin*, as Isherwood himself recognised, is that it was neither dramatic nor meaty, but simply a series of airily impressionistic sketches and anecdotes strung together to illustrate the gradual, almost imperceptible process whereby the Berlin of the Twenties, the city of gaiety and sin, turned into the seedbed of the Nazi terror.

Where Isherwood deliberately avoided making connections, allowing his point to loom like a sinister watermark behind his stories, Bob Fosse makes so many that the film gradually sinks under a mass of cross-cutting (from a cabaret number to Nazis beating up a man in the street, for instance) and interpolations (Joel Grey's face cut in to mock with a sneer any illusions about future happiness). These crude devices are well matched by the crassness with which everything is placed under a magnifying glass so

that its significance is screamed in banner headlines: Nazi salutes, rallies and brutalities tumble busily about the screen; the signs of decadence are multiplied to include flagellation tableaux, women wrestling in mud, a lady *tête-à-tête* with a Negro; and even Sally Bowles, Isherwood's self-contained heroine, is provided with a father who doesn't love her so that she can engage in a flood of self-pity.

Even worse is the cavalier way Fosse treats the stage original to a manipulation and mutilation exemplified by his handling of 'Tomorrow Belongs to Me'. In the original this was sung by the M.C. and a chorus of waiters as a dreamily lyrical ballad, leaving the words to carry the chill charge of its meaning as a hymn to a Nazi future. In the film it is begun in much the same way by a Hitlerjugend in a beer garden; but although the point is already underlined, the tempo is gradually accentuated into a military march, Nazi salutes proliferate, hysteria mounts, and the camera sinks to its knees for adoring, propaganda-angle shots of the mob. Then, just to make sure, Michael York turns enquiringly to a German friend: 'Do you still think you can control them?'

*Cabaret*, in fact, is so mismanaged that it would hardly be worth bothering with, but for three things. First, the fact that it has made several American critics go berserk ('*Cabaret* is a great movie musical, made, miraculously, without compromise'—Pauline Kael). Second, the fact that Bob Fosse undoubtedly has it in him to direct a great musical: his staging of the numbers is edgily brilliant, and on the rare occasions when one is allowed to watch them without fussy distractions (the new 'Money, Money, Money' for instance, or Joel Grey's superb love duet with a gorilla, 'If You Could See Her Through My Eyes') they make one weep for the film that might have been. Third, and perhaps most important of all, the fact that what is really wrong with *Cabaret* is a contagious disease that has affected every film musical of

recent years with the exception of *Finian's Rainbow*: the need to be more than a musical.

Like *On a Clear Day You Can See For Ever*, *Cabaret* expends acres of footage on shallow explorations of its plot, and it suffers from the inevitable corollary that the musical numbers tend to become mere adjuncts to a dramatic narrative. Though preserved more or less intact, the songs sung by Joel Grey as the M.C. have been edged out of their focal position to become peripheral comments, leaving as the main action a dreadfully convoluted romantic plot which contrives to have the best of both worlds, Isherwood's and its own, by making the hero both a homosexual and a heterosexual lover for Sally Bowles, and which any self-respecting musical would have dispatched in a song or two. Indeed, the stage version did so in two of the best numbers in the show: 'Don't Tell Mama', the song which introduced Sally at the cabaret and told one all one needs to know about her background, her innocence, and her disarming amorality; and 'Perfectly Marvellous', the duet for Sally and Cliff/Brian which established their perfect, platonic understanding.

It goes almost without saying that both songs have disappeared, made redundant by screeds of dialogue, and that they have been replaced by two new songs for Sally, written by John Kander but having less to do with *Cabaret* than with making full use of Liza Minnelli's talents. She sings them beautifully while the plot steps aside to let her do so, but the result, like her campus cutie interpretation of Isherwood's lost generation heroine, is Las Vegas 1971 rather than Berlin 1931. 'Made, miraculously, without compromise?' Well, hardly, since the whole point of the exercise seems to have been to build a juicy, Oscar-winning part for Liza Minnelli (Heartbreak with songs), and to hell with Isherwood, Kander and those Nazis.

TOM MILNE

'Fat City': Jeff Bridges, Stacy Keach



## Fat City

The first distinctive thing about *Fat City* is the way it looks. But then that is hardly surprising: for years now practically every Huston film has had its own distinctive look. From the Toulouse-Lautrec colours of *Moulin Rouge* and the nineteenth-century whaling-print effect of *Moby Dick* through to the colour-washing of *Reflections in a Golden Eye* and the medieval tapestry textures of *A Walk with Love and Death*, this extreme and close concern with the overall visual effect of a film has been a Huston trademark. And so it is with *Fat City* (Columbia-Warner): the colour is deliberately faded, almost like a Fifties B-feature in some such process as Trucolor, and the interiors are shot by Conrad Hall in a bluish haze, as though through the atmosphere of a smoke-filled pool-hall.

Both of which associations are entirely appropriate. Basically it is a story on the pattern familiar from Fifties B-features: a hasbeen boxer who has rebelled against the ring but is still hopelessly drawn back to it discovers and befriends a young hopeful on his way up, and as the older boxer's star sinks the younger's rises. At least that was the conventional pattern in sporting films of the period, though this time there are, needless to say, variations, subtleties and refinements. In Leonard Gardner's screenplay there are no obvious blacks and whites, only shades of grey. The hasbeen boxer (Stacy Keach) never has been anywhere very much anyway; while the youngster (Jeff Bridges) seems to have neither the talent nor the staying power, nor even the real, naked determination to win which a young black boxer keeps insisting is the *sine qua non* (not that it does him much good either). He'll probably get on all right, within the modest limits set him, but is that enough—enough to justify the suffering, the physical danger, all those things which are just as present at the bottom of the boxing game as at the top

(probably more so), without any of the spectacular rewards?

It is one of the great advantages of Huston's film that it romanticises nothing. When the small-time (and even so not very successful) manager enthuses to his somnolent wife about this fantastic new boy he has discovered, one senses without being told that he has said and thought and hoped the same thing a thousand times, and that this time is unlikely to be any more realistic than the rest. And then there is the marvellously ruthless, funny, frightening conversation between the manager and one of his cronies in which they discuss past injuries and present consequences with cool, unself-conscious detachment: that's part of the life, it's not a risk but a certainty, and even if you tell a novice that his nose will be set right away as good as new, you don't believe it and you don't really expect him to.

The script's image is one, if not of unrelieved gloom, at least of unrelieved squalor. Everything about the lives of these people is seedy and grubby, and their settings match this down to the last detail. The grimy, rundown backgrounds of Stockton, an ill-favoured area of near-shantytown Los Angeles, provide a natural counterpart to the interior world of the characters, and the bare farming country of the San Joaquin Valley, where the two boxers find some sort of temporary work while fighting their manifest destiny, is little better; indeed, in pay it is even worse, and the conditions of work are hardly better in immediate practice, while lacking even that remote possibility of the crock of gold at the end of the rainbow which somehow keeps fighters at it even when the dream has receded almost for good.

But the backgrounds, for all their expressiveness, remain as in all Huston's films merely backgrounds; it is his inexhaustible interest in people which prevents him from falling into sterile aestheticism. And he is one of the very few directors who appear to be equally at home with men and women. Obviously he is a man's man, and nearly all his subjects are clearly situated in a man's world, but he never fights shy of his women characters, and obviously accepts them very much on their own terms rather than as adjuncts—Women's Lib should approve of him, whether they do or not. The big chances in *Fat City* go mostly to the male leads, excellently played by Stacy Keach and Jeff Bridges (who does wonders with the less showy, more difficult part of the simple but not entirely singleminded younger boxer). But probably the character everyone will remember most vividly from the film is Oma, the drunken girl-friend of the older boxer. She is played by Susan Tyrell, a New York stage actress, with immaculate control of timing and grading of effects, so that her gradual decline from slightly tearful tipsiness to maudlin incapacity during the long and very funny scene of her first real pick-up by Tully, which could be one of those superficially impressive, actressy bravura pieces, becomes very believable and even rather touching—you can see, in spite of everything, just what attracts Tully to this slatternly wreck of a woman.

The principal roles of course are played by professionals, but most of the lesser roles of boxers and hangers-on are played by non-professionals, and very well too. Indeed, in general the film is a surprising fusion of the old and the new. In one way it suggests, somehow, *The Last Picture Show*, except that it really does, quite self-consciously, what Bogdanovich's film labours so hard to do: it evokes the world of the 1950s because Huston can think himself back into the period so easily, without all the paraphernalia of period reconstruction. It is tempting to go a stage further and say: because Huston himself still belongs to the period. But a second thought at once shows the falsity of this, at least as a limitation. For *Fat City* is at once a very solid, traditional film, and a very modern film, with its flattish, cool surface which allows so much to be apparently thrown away without



'Bleak Moments': Sarah Stephenson, Anne Raitt

contrived dramatic emphasis, and yet ensures that everything that needs to be understood is understood, all the lights and shadows fall in the right places. Finally, *Fat City* is a timeless film, one of those late films by old masters that look effortless because they are effortless, come out right because the film-maker has forgotten more about his craft than most of his juniors have ever learnt.

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

## Bleak Moments

There is nothing quite like English suburbia, and a solid tradition of literary commentators, from Arnold Bennett to William Cooper, has ventured down the tree-lined avenues to unmask the mysteries of life behind the chintz curtains. Film attitudes to suburban life have ranged from that quintessentially British stance of bemused tolerance (possession is nine-tenths of happiness) to vituperative, and sometimes intolerant, rejection of all those lovingly sustained semi-detached values, a critical line extending from the generalised hostility of *Look Back in Anger* to the particular commitment of *Family Life*. In Mike Leigh's *Bleak Moments* (Contemporary), which seldom ventures beyond the dowdy claustrophobia of red brick and brown sofas, suburbia is hell on earth.

In this case, hell is more than other people, it's other people because of and in spite of oneself. At first glance Sylvia (Anne Raitt), around whom the other characters pivot but with whom they don't begin to connect, seems well enough equipped to cope with whatever the world has to offer. She is attractive, intelligent, and graced with an appealing if bizarre sense of humour which is as often as not directed against herself; she is also endowed with an enviable tolerance of other people's idiosyncrasies, which extends even to her typist colleague and limpet-like friend Pat (Joolia Cappleman), one of those archetypal permanent spinsters whose untuned cheerfulness and ubiquitous knitting are an unspoken admission that opportunity has passed her by. In *Bleak Moments*, though, appearances are never deceptive. Everyone Sylvia encounters in this cramped stretch of South London is a victim of himself, trapped by circumstances like most people but also self-immured from the world outside by the unwished for agonies of the space between words.

Sylvia herself is inextricably bound by and to Hilda, her twenty-nine-year-old sister whom brain damage has imprisoned in permanent childhood; Pat, who hangs round Sylvia like a clinging vine, has befriended Hilda, but perhaps only because she sees in this mute surrogate child a welcome release from her own querulous, bedridden mother and such irritations as a set of false teeth left in a glass for visitors to remark. The film quietly, patiently documents this seemingly permanent impasse while recording Sylvia's attempt to break down the barriers of her circumscribed environment, first with Peter (Eric Allen), a paralytically diffident schoolteacher, and intermittently, when Peter advances in retreat, with Norman (Mike Bradwell), a shambling, nervous drifter who camps in her garage to operate a duplicating machine for a magazine run by his friends. Sylvia's protracted encounters with these two paragons of non-communication add up to a depressing spectacle of the danger zones of human relationships.

But it's not entirely a catalogue of depression. Mike Leigh leavens the general gloom (pervasive enough to make an audience despair of the characters as much as they despair of each other) with a layer of sidelong humour which shows through almost in spite of itself. In this, his method obviously recalls both Olmi and Forman, especially in the almost methodical way he builds a scene to a crashing anti-climax. Like these masters of observational cinema, Leigh records human eccentricity from a point of view that is critical perhaps (it is their inability to meet society's expectations of them as much as their failure to break free of their own constraints which makes these characters what they are) but never jaundiced. In this sense Leigh is nearer to Olmi, and particularly the Olmi of *Il Posto* and *I Fidanzati*, than to Forman, since there is hardly a suggestion that his viewpoint is ambiguous or detached; though he shares with Forman the capacity to make us laugh at the weaknesses of others while being pulled up by an uncomfortable realisation that their frailties are only our own writ large.

Far from being sociological types of human behaviour (perennial stumbling block of British realist cinema), these people are also recognisable for what they are in their own right. Sylvia, for instance, has a way of sidling into a conversation with a totally disconnected, anarchic remark, which is both surprising and consistent with her own interior conflict—the familiar nervous, well-meaning ploy of channel-

ling aggression through other people. Wake up and I will wake up is what she is desperately trying to say. Engaging battle with Norman, she quietly remarks that she is 'the President of Venezuela', which prompts him to an admission that he is not from Doncaster but from Scunthorpe, an exchange encapsulating the whole web of class consciousness which has previously (though never of course in so many words) enmeshed their relationship. For an instant, the barriers are down, a victory achieved by Sylvia's anxious but resolute determination to assert herself; the next moment they are up again, the tide breaking through a wall of sand as Pat, who lives for other people's birthday cards, blurts out a request for Norman to strum a song they can all join in.

The highlight, if that is the word, of the film's observation of this war of nerves is Sylvia's confrontation (and that is the word) with Peter, whose own bottled aggression is characterised—in maybe the film's one unsympathetic moment—when he stumbles through McLuhan's theory of communication. 'I find it easier watching radio,' Sylvia counters to his frustratingly irrelevant question about the relative merits of radio and television. There is one scene, a disastrous dinner in an almost deserted Chinese restaurant with a supercilious waiter dancing non-attendance, which is pure Olmi, even to the long shot isolating the two of them against a forest of table-cloths. And when Sylvia takes her feckless suitor home to ply him with sherry and finally ask him point-blank to drop his trousers, Leigh's patient, almost immaculately classical editing communicates the embarrassment with a familiarity which makes one shift nervously in one's seat.

*Bleak Moments* is perhaps a little too long and in a sense trapped by its own claustrophobia, in that what one misses is a counterpoint with the world outside; Leigh's theatre background may account for this. But as a first film it is an entirely original and (yes) highly promising work, shot in appropriately muted colour by Bahram Manoochehri. It was made, amazingly, for about £18,000, and shot at a 7:1 ratio. Suffice it to say that this only goes to demonstrate what you can do if you want to.

DAVID WILSON

## Running Scared

'Slight' and 'derivative' have been the common critical pejoratives to greet David Hemmings' first film, and to an extent both are justified. Hemmings' central character is Tom, a young Cambridge undergraduate, and the film charts his moral development from the carefully reasoned detachment with which he observes his friend's suicide in an adjoining room at Cambridge, refusing to intervene ('I was concerned with letting him die the way he wanted to'), to the awareness, through falling in love with his dead friend's sister, that feeling is itself as important a guide to the right action as reason. In bald outline the film sounds like a slightly facile moral allegory, and certainly the screenplay (by Hemmings and Clive Exton) has simplified plot and character to put the main burden of expression on metaphors built into the dialogue and the visual background. At the same time, Hemmings and Exton have located their characters identifiably in Losey country, in that privileged social stratum which moves exclusively between university and a home life insulated by wealth. In this context, emotions appear in cryptic or distorted form through a haze of social decorum, and metaphor and innuendo (or even games of tennis) become tactical substitutes for the direct communication of feeling.

If Losey emerges as the main influence on the film's circumspect, metaphorical style, Hemmings has also looked to Antonioni. An elaborately symbolic use of colour and composition,



'Running Scared': Robert Powell

and of juxtapositions between the old and the new (abstract paintings line the stairway of the Cases' otherwise conservatively decorated house) suggest the Antonioni of *The Red Desert* and after, and it's worth remembering that Hemmings himself worked with the director on *Blow-Up*. Throughout the middle section of the film, Tom is dressed in blue, a colour obviously associated with lack of feeling. And the colour scheme is made emphatic by the use of blue as the dominant shade on the newly painted barge, in the mother's bewildered reaction to Tom's sudden courtship of Ellen ('You did rather arrive out of the blue'), and even in Ellen's also wearing blue until the moment when both confess their love (and appear in the next scene wearing brown!). If all this seems a little schematic at times—especially in the bizarre shot showing the blue-dressed Tom confronting the white-dressed mother against a matching background of blue dustbins and whitewashed wall—it also suggests that Hemmings is concerned with using the basic semantics of film to develop his theme rather than simply telling a story in scenes and dialogue.

Which brings one to the problem of discovering exactly what the film's theme is. Although Tom's development from dispassionate moralist to emotional victim is meticulously traced (and marked by three pivotal incidents: the friend's suicide, Tom's mercy killing of his dog, his own final suicide), there is no indication that he has progressed in any significant way. Although the film's repeated shots of light growing at the end of a tunnel, and the whole motif of the barge's rehabilitation and journey upstream, hint symbolically at some kind of rejuvenation, he remains in essence a coward, forever 'running scared'. His proudly rationalised non-intervention in his friend's suicide is condemned as a failure to hear—and act on—a hidden cry for help ('My brother used to say that people were helpless, not hopeless' says Ellen at one point); and there is tragic justice in Ellen's refusal to hear his silent appeal when he hands her the symbolic bullet in their last scene together.

But by this time the film seems to be chasing its own tail in shapely but pointless thematic circles, and the incessantly hinting, two-edged dialogue begins to seem quite as mannered and obstructive as the bourgeois decorum and

phrase-making that the film is purportedly satirising. The two central characters, intelligently played by Robert Powell and Gayle Hunnicutt, never quite emerge fully realised from the schematism of their background, while the subordinate characters are strictly out of stock, from Ellen's upper-crust family, forever caught in frigid postures (mother hunched over *The Times* crossword, father conducting to unheard music on an earphone radio) to the cockney boat-hand who, presumably because he is working-class, is the only character who expresses unforced emotion.

Early on in the film, the hero is escorted reluctantly to his friend's funeral because, his father tells him, it is a 'necessary social observance'. Hemmings' first film, one feels, suffers from an excessive regard for 'necessary cinematic observance'. Characters and dramatic momentum are sacrificed to a near-abstract reliance on the information conveyed through sound and image. Against the stagy and technically uninspired background of much recent British cinema, it's a noble failing, but it results none the less in a film that at times seems only half alive.

NIGEL ANDREWS

## They Might Be Giants

A flawed or mutilated film sometimes acquires an enigmatic fascination, which may not have been part of the maker's intention but which can even add mysteriously to its appeal. *Major Dundee* and Losey's *Eve* are obvious examples. Anthony Harvey's *They Might Be Giants* (Rank), adapted by James Goldman from his own play, is reputed to have been somewhat pruned in the United States, and the British distributors have seemingly removed a further two minutes from the penultimate scene. Certainly there is a distinct jolt in the continuity about fifteen minutes from the end, but the actual finale has a melancholy poetic symbolism which still manages to stay in key with the mood of the film as a whole. It is a subtle and difficult mood to sustain, moving sometimes close to slapstick and skirting the fringes of whimsy, but never overbalancing into either.

Justin Playfair (a name Bunyan might have

invented) is a brilliant and respected New York lawyer whose grief at his wife's death has caused him to retreat into delusion. He believes himself to be Sherlock Holmes and has acquired the great detective's dress, mannerisms and habits, together with a properly Holmesian clarity and precision of mind. He is well aware that his brother is hoping to get him confined in an institution to gain control of his money, but when he is taken to a dubious psychiatric clinic Justin sweeps in with magnificent panache, confounds everyone with his authority, and diagnoses by Holmesian deduction that a mute patient must be a silent film star. Sure enough, the patient believes himself to be Rudolph Valentino. Justin departs in style: 'My best to Vilma Banky.'

'Valentino's' analyst becomes intensely interested in Justin as a classic paranoiac; but when she visits him in his elaborate Victorian laboratory (a set which might have been imported direct from 221b Baker Street) she finds that it is she who is under analysis. Justin correctly deduces that she is a lonely, disorganised and incompetent woman, and finds her totally uninteresting until she reveals that her name is Dr. Watson. Immediately he turns the full force of his personality on her, and she finds herself so far drawn into his fantasy that they are soon dashing around the rain-sodden streets together, pursuing a wild series of 'clues' on the track of Holmes' elusive enemy Moriarty and themselves pursued by the murderous blackmailer who is threatening Justin's brother.

Much of the ensuing action is shot on location in some dauntingly wintry areas of New York, where poor Watson is constantly wet, breathless and often shoeless, while Holmes remains imperturbable. George C. Scott (much in his *Adrian Messenger* manner) and a mildly frumpish and very likeable Joanne Woodward establish all the humour and edginess and awkward affection of a relationship between two quietly desperate people. The elusive, perceptive flavour of Anthony Harvey's film is in the way the players' humanity, and the shabby realism of the setting, blends with the obsessive lunatic logic of their quest. Along the way, they attract the loyalty of a little army of misfits and dreamers: an elderly couple who have retreated to their roof garden since 1939, 'Valentino' and his nurse, and the entire clientele of a tiny, scruffy cinema which was once devoted to the moral simplicities of the Western but has now betrayed its audience by going over to sex films.

The Holmes jokes continue to evoke joyously funny moments ('So pleased to meet you, Mr. Rathbone,' is the delighted greeting of a tough cop summoned to arrest Justin), but the overtones become increasingly Freudian and Quixotic. Justin's pursuit of his clues works by a process of free association; his attitude to 'Moriarty' could even be connected in his mind, through his lawyer's Latin, with the idea of death. It was, after all, the death of his wife that sparked his original breakdown; and there is a moment in the film, when he thinks Watson too has left him, when a doubting Holmes comes close to despair.

Justin, one infers, has always tilted at windmills: after all, he says, 'they might be giants'. He is leading his little band of eccentrics on a merry liberation march towards the ultimate confrontation with Moriarty when the continuity gap occurs. What seems to be missing is a sense of ever-closing pursuit by a brutally conformist society; but the final scene is still touching and dreamlike—a conclusion more Quixotic than Holmesian. The euphoria of the march has faded. Holmes and Watson are deserted by their followers ('after all, they did not really understand what it was all about') and descend a sort of manhole. They emerge together standing at the mouth of a tunnel in Central Park, serene and confident in their mutual affection. Already they can hear the distant pounding of hooves in the darkness of the tunnel. That pale horse perhaps whose rider is death? If so, Holmes and Watson are ready to face him together.

BRENDA DAVIES

## King Lear

A ragged procession of vagabonds, beggars and cripples makes its way across a rocky waste land to the brink of a low-lying plain beyond which, glimmering in a weak sun, stand the four-square walls of Lear's castle. Like Peter Brook, Kozintsev opens his film of *King Lear* (Contemporary) with a glimpse of the silently expectant subjects whose fate hangs on the decisions taken by a remote and capricious royalty. Unlike Brook, however, Kozintsev introduces this glimpse of the common people not as a means of isolating the political moment before turning full attention to the royal groups, but as the first indication that this is in part a

sociological *Lear*, with Edgar's affectation of beggarly madness and the King's own descent into penury constantly mirrored in the real condition of Lear's poorest subjects. Kozintsev's *Lear* is 'Russian' not only in its style—the strong pictorial sense, the studied nobility of the acting, the lavish scale of the crowd scenes and of Evgeni Enei's castle interiors—but in its political consciousness. 'The feudal order is absurd and can be described only in terms of the absurd,' says Jan Kott in his essay on *Lear*, and Kozintsev is at pains to stress the social and political incongruities of Lear's Britain as well as the personal tragedy of Lear himself.

I see Kozintsev's film not as the story of the majesty and fall of Lear alone but as a many-voiced symphony, in which are elaborately intertwined the destinies of different people and the destiny of an age. Yutkevitch's summing-up of the film pinpoints its distinctive approach. The social perspective is constantly widened, not only (as in Kozintsev's *Hamlet*) to include the courtiers as an ever-responder chorus within the castle scenes (recoiling in choreographed unison from Cordelia's dispassionate reply to her father's 'Which of you shall we say doth love us most?'), but also, in sardonic counterpoint, to cross the play's various royal progresses with stray caravans of vagabonds and beggars, who in their turn erupt into the central arena of the tragedy. Edgar thus takes the inspiration for his Poor Tom character from a mad beggar who passes him on the heath; and the hovel scene takes on a wealth of new meaning when Kozintsev sets it in a crowded doss-house, Lear reciting his demented courtroom speech to a roomful of open-mouthed paupers.

But far from turning these innovations to explicitly didactic ends, Kozintsev draws no moral guidelines for the audience. Lear's moral stature and that of all the characters, servants or masters, lie in their actions, not in any innate 'nobility' or social standing. Yuri Jarvet makes his first entrance as Lear in giggling, boyish conversation with the Fool, and builds through the film the portrait less of an overbearing patriarch than of an alternately impetuous and beatific Dostoevskian 'idiot'. Characterisation throughout transcends stereotype, and a play which can easily seem a simplistic parable about family ingratitude, and privilege and responsibility as the inseparable concomitants of power, gains depth from a portraitist's attention to details of character. Goneril and Regan are a sour, matronly pair of opportunists whose diplomatic patience is taxed beyond endurance by the capricious whims of their father. Cordelia and the Fool, the play's contrasted faces of goodness, here share the same saintly, crop-headed beauty. Most strikingly, Gloucester emerges as far more than the traditional poor man's Lear of the subplot, played here as a plump, womanish busybody whose myopic fussing leads him swiftly and predictably into the trap laid by his calculating son.

Kozintsev's is a 'larger' *Lear* than we are used to on stage—and larger than Brook's comparatively ascetic film version—not only in terms of social perspective and psychological vision, but in terms of spectacle. There is a symphonic quality in the film's key visual sequences—the succession of shots that precede the storm, for instance, building from the slow pan across a darkening horizon, to a swift tracking shot of horsemen thundering through the castle gate, to the crowning overhead shot of Lear and the Fool stumbling blindly across the empty heath. It is Kozintsev's visual genius, which never works at the expense of character or isolated symbolic detail, that arguably turns the scale in a comparison with Brook's film. And if the temptation occurs to accuse him of operatic overstatement, it is worth considering the film's last shot, which has Edgar, due to deliver the play's concluding moral quatrain, instead simply gazing expressionlessly into the camera and passing silently out of shot.

'They Might Be Giants': Joanne Woodward, George C. Scott



Kozintsev's effective harmonising of the epic and personal values in the play is reflected not only in a camera style that alternates dramatically between the panorama and the close-up (Lear's curse on Goneril is delivered almost as a pensive aside as the King mounts into his coach), but in the superbly geared contrasts of Shostakovich's music, moving between the brass crescendos or the massed hymns of the epic set pieces (the storm, the closing battle) and the pulsing, scherzo-like music of the early court scenes (which ironically accompanies the first quarrel between Goneril and Lear, their voices rising gradually above the strained conviviality of the banquet, and the camera moving from a wide-angle shot of the festivities to a zooming close-up of Lear as he finally turns away murmuring 'Does anyone here know me?').

At the same time Kozintsev's screenplay, adapted from Pasternak's translation, takes fewer liberties with the text or structure than Brook did (the one startling omission, which suggests failure of nerve in filming a scene clearly more suited to the stage, being Gloucester's illusory suicide attempt at Dover), and in the process proves just how dramatically sound Shakespeare's ordering of events is in the play. Where Brook held back the whole Gloucester conspiracy until after the scene in Goneril's castle, Kozintsev more effectively follows Shakespeare's interweaving of both episodes, setting up a richly detailed counterpoint between plot and subplot. To quote again from Yutkevitch's article on the film: 'A story which has not been forced into any pattern of interpretation remains close to contemporary experience.' It is a tribute to Kozintsev that he has brought Shakespeare's play fully and idiosyncratically to life without any strenuous reshaping of the original.

NIGEL ANDREWS



'How to Steal a Diamond': Zero Mostel, Robert Redford

chief is hardly surprised to find that the telephone is out of order again. Downstairs in the cells, a black prisoner beatifically greets the apocalypse ('You doing all this for me? That's the most beautiful thing I ever heard') as phony bombs explode all around and cops scurry frenziedly about yelling 'Revolution!'. The diamond, of course, is not where it is supposed to be, and the attackers melt away as quickly as they came, leaving the police chief to savour the sweet smell of victory: 'We beat 'em, men.'

The trouble is that there is really nothing to get one's teeth into. At the beginning, a promisingly abrasive relationship is set up between Robert Redford as a hardened, daring criminal troubled by ulcers, and George Segal as his eager but nerve-ridden brother-in-law. Fetching Redford from jail after he is paroled, for instance, Segal is so foxed by his stolen car that he all but flattens him to the ground; against his better judgment, Redford then lets family sentiment prevail and allows Segal to join the gang; and in one of the most charming sequences in the film, has to cheer encouragement like a football coach with promises of headline glory as Segal falters in his crucial lock-picking role. Subsequently all this is forgotten, and one is faced with long characterless, conflict-less scenes in which the not very interesting action is the only interest.

Nevertheless, *The Hot Rock* is a film to be savoured at leisure and with forbearance, like a good but not quite vintage after-dinner brandy. For its casual, throwaway humour; for the performances of Redford, Segal and Ron Leibman, as the member of the gang to whom machines are like harps to Harpo Marx; and for the superb jazz score by Quincy Jones, which knows exactly when to make itself heard and turns the final sequence into a small rhapsody of pure, unadulterated exhilaration.

TOM MILNE

## How To Steal a Diamond in Four Uneasy Lessons

For one dread moment, as Robert Redford and George Segal stare in awe at the massive glass cage in a museum which guards the fabulous Sahara Stone with all electronic mod. cons., it looks as though *How to Steal a Diamond in Four Uneasy Lessons* (Fox) is going to be a remake of *Tophapi*. But all is well. 'It's kind of European and I learned it when I was at the Sorbonne,' explains the explosives expert as he helpfully demonstrates Molotov cocktails until he finds one ('I picked this up at Berkeley') that will suit. And in a moment of exquisitely timed disaster as the gang are within inches of success, their tired muscles give way and the glass lid slides irresistibly back into position, leaving George Segal pinned foolishly inside as he reaches for the prize and the alarm bells begin to ring.

All, unfortunately, does not remain entirely well. Scripted by William Goldman with his special brand of civilised wit which plays happily with the dichotomy between conventional actions and eccentric dialogue, and directed by Peter Yates with a disdain for fashionable tricks which fends off the cuteness that marred Goldman's script for *Butch Cassidy, The Hot Rock* (to give the film its more appealing American title) is often delightfully funny. Nowhere more so than in the attack on the police station where the diamond has somehow been mislaid, and which begins with the pirate helicopter landing on the wrong roof, to be ungraciously redirected a couple of blocks away by two old men sunning themselves. 'Say, have you guys got the right place?' asks a bemused cop as the masked raiders surge into the police station in full military array. Upstairs, irritable but resigned ('Have you tried monkeying with it?'), the police

stakes and in extending still further his eclectic range of subjects; and also a relaxation, in that Bogdanovich has pronounced himself happiest over the direction of this particular movie, with its less premeditated and intellectualised approach.

But although he plays at this rejuvenated convention with the air of an adept who knows all the rules of the game, not everything in Bogdanovich's treatment comes together as well as it should, and not everyone on his team plays together as well as he might. The challenge does not seem to have been consistently met, with the comedy breaking down into some splendidly developed individual gags which leaven rather than bring to life the film's interweaving plots; and the relaxation too often looks like a surrender to the overriding gloss of big production values. What the film comes to lack overall is a mood of its own.

A lot of the difficulty is exemplified in the casting and the way Bogdanovich has set about converting his Hawksian originals. Playing Howard Bannister, the dedicated young musicologist out to win a handsome research grant despite the natural hazards of an unscrupulous rival and his own absent-mindedness, and Judy Maxwell, the young lady with an encyclopaedic mind and a liberating sense of fun which just as easily provokes hysteria, are Ryan O'Neal and Barbra Streisand; and playing such a pair of opposites that they seem set for a cosmic confrontation. In fact, it is exactly the sense of distance between them, rather than any interplay, which emerges, not only defining them as immovable object and irresistible force in a way the Grant-Hepburn team were never reduced to, but stranding them somehow in different worlds. O'Neal, never particularly persuasive as the scientific mind grown tipsy and incoherent through its own obsessions, is also never convincingly affected by the humiliations and eventual humanising showered on him by the eccentric Streisand, who plays the spirit of subversive irresponsibility to some wickedly witty but dubiously effective extremes.

In the chaos which reigns round this incredible pair—a succession of subplots crowding through the hotel rooms of the San Francisco Hilton and involving government papers, a cache of jewels and eventually the rocks which are the inspiration for Howard's revolutionary theory of primitive music—the same calculated excess often simply accumulates rather than builds on its effects. In fact, the slickness of the verbal wit and the proliferation of the visual comedy frequently threaten to turn the piece into a farce for frenzied automata. A tendency emphasised by Bogdanovich's skill at every kind of pastiche gag—which follow in swift and numbing succession during the car chase, the high point involving a bit of business with a tall ladder, a banner and a large sheet of glass—but also undermined by a sense that his real gift for comedy lies in another direction.

One of the discrepancies of the film's style is that occasionally Bogdanovich does not seem to be making a crazy comedy at all. The pace slackens, and instead of the grotesques caught in the whirlwind of the plot mechanics he introduces a more subtly graded variety of character comedy. There is, for instance, the scene in Howard's hotel room, the morning after the rapidly escalating escapades on the seventeenth floor have virtually reduced it to rubble, when the manager arrives to deliver a coolly understated but unmistakable invitation for Howard to leave; or the judge who eventually tries to bring some law and order to the impossible shambles and is allowed a surprisingly long build-up to his small scene, glaring round the courtroom and finding even the spectators to be unspeakably evil, while he prepares to face the parade of petty offenders as if it were an earnest rehearsal for Armageddon.

RICHARD COMBS

## What's Up, Doc?

A sense of film history has been incorporated quite naturally in Peter Bogdanovich's previous movies, as a consciously accepted tradition and as a source of stylistic reference. *What's Up, Doc?* (Columbia-Warner) actually plunders that history, making rather more of the personal enthusiasms that are the basis of Bogdanovich's own film scholarship in revamping Thirties screwball comedy, and re-creating a few traits of Hawks in his *Bringing Up Baby* mood. It involves something of a twofold challenge, in the director's climb to the high production

## Copyright and the Pirates

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already installed and costing less than the cheapest (silent) or middle range (sound) hi-fi equipment, it is only natural that their owners should start looking for films to buy. Consequently, we now have a flourishing market in 8 mm. prints of feature and short films, sound and silent, modern and vintage, colour and black and white, and at least one KRS member company has released a few films on to this market. At £2 a reel (for b/w silents), or £3 for a 2-reel Chaplin Mutual, it is not difficult to collect films as one does gramophone records and books. For the price of two volumes of Rachael Low you can buy a complete print of *Nosferatu*; for three times as much you may be able to get *Stagecoach*.

The KRS does not approve of this, for it marks a breach in its established doctrine of 'hire and fire' (distribution prints are always destroyed by burning at the end of the contract period). Consequently, few relatively recent films are legitimately put on sale. But cassettes are beginning to force the issue. Already large contracts have been concluded for the supply of cassettes (by sale) to chains of American hotels and for use on board ships. It is impossible to believe that the economic pressure built up through these specialised marketing ventures will not eventually burst on to the general market; that once manufacturers produce prints (or rather tapes) of films by the thousand instead of by the dozen, it

will not be long before those tapes are put in shop windows next to the music cassettes and in supermarkets next to the paperbacks.

When this happens, and I think it will be soon, the antiquated marketing methods of the established film distributors will crack. Already they have had to come to terms with the first buffeting wave of television. After fighting an entirely negative rearguard action to save the traditional distribution patterns, the industry had to concede that TV was a legitimate screen on which films might be shown. But instead of the merely restrictive practices of FIDO (which itself might be an unlawful cartel under EEC law!) it would have been better to rethink more fundamentally the interaction between the two branches of the entertainment industry. (In Italy, for instance, the state television company RAI is now a leading source of film finance and sponsorship of films.) The new agreement in France follows that approach, and provides for joint building of studios and cross-financing between the two media.

Similarly, if they are wise, the distributors will begin meditating on their market function when they have lost their erstwhile tight physical control over their films. For this is really the cause of their present piracy problems. If the distribution and exhibition systems had been more flexible, had not been so wedded to protection of existing interests, the working men's clubs could have got their prints from legitimate sources, just as book club members bypass

their local bookseller. And with the main market gone it would probably not be worth the pirates' while to build up clandestine circuits.

In developing their new position—a service rather than a property function—the distributors will almost certainly draw nearer to the record manufacturers as regards both enforcement (through the Performing Rights Society) and licensing (the Performing Rights Tribunal). For the copyright law emphasis in film matters will have shifted from the physical copying or manufacturing right, valuable though it will be, to the supervision of public performance in order to ensure royalty payments. The fact that gramophone records too are being subjected to a wave of blatant piracy is another story. And so is the imminent breakdown of the whole edifice of copyright law under the uncontrollable impact of photocopyers, tape recorders and videotape recorders, of claims by performers, authors, painters and others for their cut of the proceeds from new forms of exploitation, of the claims for special indulgences made by the poor countries (and some not so poor), and of the fragmentation of normal diffusion channels into a variety of circuits, many of them semi-private and difficult to police.

Film copyright has never been properly thought out from its basic fundamentals, through adequate discussion between all the interests involved. Today, more than ever, that is necessary. For the interests can be reconciled, if only they are brought out into the open. But that, also, is another story. ■

## BOOK REVIEWS

### JEAN RENOIR: The World of his Films

By Leo Braudy

DOUBLEDAY, NEW YORK, \$8.95

At last, I think it is fair to say since the Bazin anthology turned out to be such a disjointed disappointment, a book worthy of Renoir. Not the book, but at least a book, and one which does not try to cram Renoir into a preconceived pattern (the *Premier Plan* monograph), become mystically tongue-tied in dealing with the later films (Armand-Jean Cauliez), or simply settle for woolly enthusiasms (Pierre Leprohon). Sensibly, Leo Braudy has not tried to write either a basic manual or an exhaustive analysis. Instead, assuming a considerable familiarity with Renoir's work on the part of the reader, he ranges freely back and forth through the films to explore in depth the ambivalence of what are usually considered the serene constants of Renoir's world—

Nature and Theatre.

The picture he evokes is a far cry from the accepted critical norm (a slightly straw-dummyish target, but on the whole useful and valid) of Renoir as the son of his father, luxuriating in healthy flesh, life-giving nature and rivers of peace. In fact, demonstrating the darker side of Renoir's perception of Nature, and his use of both Nature and Theatre to distance his vision of an imperfect but perhaps perfectible society, Braudy builds a solid and convincing platform from which to explore not only the continuity of Renoir's themes, but the increasing despair which occasions the later, 'celebratory' films:

'... In the 1950s, when the community was not only threatened but seemed even totally lost, both Renoir and Ford, in their own ways, made films of the past, of the older community of relation, half nostalgic and half clearly aware of the loss. In a larger sense how much difference is there between Boudu's

float down the Loing to a new life and the Provençal river of sexual liberation that carries Etienne Alexis in *Déjeuner* from his television speeches on artificial insemination to his rest beneath an olive tree near the old Renoir home at Cagnes? But in the context of the early 1930s Boudu is hailed as "anarchist", while in the late 1950s and early 1960s *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* could be scorned for its easy pastorality, or even its "fascism". Does Renoir in the end of *Eléna* really mean that the sight of love will quiet the "Rollanist" crowd? Does Ford, in *The Sun Shines Bright*, released in 1954, the year of Brown v. Board of Education, believe that the image of the good Judge Priest in the harmonious Southern society is an example of a social salvation that actually works? Both films are romances of history rather than history itself. In harsh times, both Renoir and Ford follow their preoccupation with community to an attempt to establish the ideal, even in the reconstructed past, rather than exploiting a more fashionable, and more acceptable, pessimism. The studio sets of *French Cancan* and *Eléna* are Renoir's equivalent of the Golden World, images of possibility rather than limitation.'

Occasionally, in his pursuit of his theme, Braudy is trapped into simplifications, and even more occasionally into over-statement, as when he bolsters his argument (true) that water is by no means

always benevolent for Renoir by saying (false) that 'Suicide in Renoir's films invariably takes place in rivers.' Accumulating evidence to the contrary—suicide by scissors and revolver (*Nana*), jumping from a train (*La Bête Humaine*), poison (*Madame Bovary*), German bullets (*La Grande Illusion*, *Le Caporal Epingle*)—one might turn Braudy's argument back against him by observing that river suicides in Renoir's films are notably *manqué* (*Boudu*, *The River*).

To no real purpose, however, since Braudy is unmistakably on the right track throughout. It is all too easy, for instance, to revel in *Partie de Campagne* as a lyrical celebration of a doomed idyll. But even here Renoir is ambivalent, and Braudy enriches the film by his insistence on the irony with which Renoir shows Henri and Henriette ('as their names suggest... easy counterparts') wallowing in a pathetic fallacy of their own making, not only about their love but about nature (Henriette relishing the bitter cherries; the couple's melancholic self-indulgence in emotion; Henri, in the coda, looking up as though expecting nature to echo his sadness, but finding only a clear sky).

The great value of Braudy's approach—which moves on from Nature and Theatre to an examination of Renoir's attitudes to society, and to a tentative but fascinating analysis of his attempts to define the complex, constantly changing character of the 'hero' in society—

is that it encompasses Renoir, tracing sidelines of development even in apparently parenthetical films like *Chotard & Compagnie*, and moulding them all into a coherent whole. For Braudy, and he demonstrates the point well, the development is clear and constant: 'If the films of the 1930s explore the possibilities of community and relation within society, then the films of the 1940s delve into the problem of individual freedom within society and on its fringes. From the films of the 1940s onward, the two themes of society and the individual frequently move together.'

By the end of the book, which works in much the same elliptical, apparently formless way as Renoir's own films (and I can pay it no greater compliment), Braudy has supplied a detailed but infinitely adaptable blueprint for comprehension of those still undervalued masterpieces of Renoir's later years: *Le Carrosse d'Or*, *French Cancan* and *Eléna et les Hommes*.

'In the films of the 1950s Renoir explores with great richness a kind of heroism hinted at only fleetingly in the films of the 1930s and 1940s. This is the heroism of perception, understood specifically as an aesthetic perception and creativity that can restore a society as well as understand it. *Le Carrosse d'Or* resembles *The River* in its basically apolitical view of society. The true co-ordinator is Camilla, the *commedia dell'arte* travelling heroine, and in Renoir's world of popular art the lineal descendant of the pulp-novel writer Monsieur Lange. *La Grande Illusion* hinted that the international fellowship of art could substitute for the old aristocratic internationalism. Such hints are realised in *Le Carrosse d'Or*. Camilla is a hero of aesthetic understanding.'

TOM MILNE

## CRAZY SUNDAYS

By Aaron Latham

SECKER AND WARBURG, £3.00

'At the sound of a light knock on the door of her office . . . Anita Loos looked up from a script. . . ' The first sentence of Aaron Latham's book about Scott Fitzgerald's years in Hollywood inspires little confidence. (Fitzgerald, of course, is doing the light knocking.) Nor do later chapter openings, in which we find Hunt Stromberg looking nervously at his watch, or Fitzgerald himself going to a cupboard 'to disturb the last rest of an old suit.' *Crazy Sundays* is the product of Mr. Latham's work for a Princeton PhD; and it leaves one almost regretting the days of the old, grey thesis. Better a little judicious boredom than this infuriating blend of well researched material with a gossip writer's buttonholing antics.

Fitzgerald's Hollywood years are hardly uncharted territory. We have had not only Sheila Graham and Budd Schulberg (Mr. Latham

manages to recount the *Winter Carnival* episode without even a footnote reference to the novel Mr. Schulberg made of it), but the biographies, the endless reminiscences of sad, silent, diminished Scott, and the sustaining fact of Fitzgerald's own letters. Even at his self-pitying, self-destructive worst, he retained his invigorating professionalism about his own and other people's writing. The writer at work, in his letters and notes and script jottings, remains more interesting than the writer being worked over.

What is needed now is not more scrapings of the biographical barrel, but an assessment of what Fitzgerald actually achieved, or hoped to achieve, in his various stints in the Dream Factory. Of this, at least, Mr. Latham is aware; but although he has gained access to the scripts, he's still hampered on two counts. The film companies seem to have been reluctant, even thirty years after, to let him quote entirely freely from material in their possession. And there is the very real problem of assessing the value and identity of scripts which were never filmed, or never completed, or worked over by other hands. Fitzgerald was not exactly neglected by Hollywood: *The Women*, *A Yank at Oxford*, *Gone With the Wind* and *Madame Curie* were not B pictures. But what he did on them was hack work; as Garson Kanin says elsewhere in this issue, a writer was a 'thing'.

It's hardly of great concern now that *A Yank at Oxford* might have been a marginally better film if it had included some particular scene devised by Fitzgerald; or that in playing script doctor to *Gone With the Wind* he kept finding himself going back to Margaret Mitchell's 'good dialogue'. His two most promising scripts, *Infidelity* and *Cosmopolitan* (the adaptation of *Babylon Revisited* which might have starred Shirley Temple), were never filmed. His one screen credit, on *Three Comrades*, was gained the hard way, on the losing end of a battle with Joseph Mankiewicz which yielded one of his most celebrated letters ('Oh, Joe, can't producers ever be wrong. . .').

Mr. Latham's book leaves no powerful impression of who was really right in this skirmish; and *Three Comrades* itself has faded into the oblivion of late night television. The book does demonstrate, however, that Fitzgerald had to learn for himself most of the lessons Stahr tries to teach Boxley in *The Last Tycoon*. Early screen stories, including a 1934 treatment of *Tender is the Night* (Nicole falls off a horse, and is rushed to the hospital where 'Richard Diver . . . promising young brain surgeon and psychiatrist, is just completing a delicate operation'), tended to be all words and melodrama. Later, in *Infidelity* and *Cosmopolitan*, Fitzgerald was writing atmospherically for the screen, in Stahr-approved style.

In fact Fitzgerald was not perhaps all that interested in being a Hollywood writer, powerless

victim of the producer and the story conference. In an early sketch of *Tender is the Night*, the Dick Diver character was to have been a film man: 'More than anything in the world he wanted to make pictures. He knew exactly what it was like to carry a picture in his head as a director did, and it seemed to him infinitely romantic.' In 1940, three months before his death, Fitzgerald wrote to Zelda: 'They've let a certain writer here direct his own pictures, and he has made such a go of it that there may be a different feeling about that soon. If I had that chance, I would attain my real goal in coming here in the first place. . .'

Hollywood, with all its bruising day to day encounters, retained for Fitzgerald that sense of romantic possibility, allied with power, which is the strength of *The Last Tycoon* as it is of *Gatsby*. Stahr is the producer idealised, carrying whole creative patterns in his head. The reality, of course, was rather different. On Mr. Latham's evidence, *Infidelity* sounds like the Fitzgerald script which made most use of the screen, escaping from words into pictures, mournfully atmospheric about life among the rich and unhappy. Censorship threatened. The best the studio could think of was to change the title to *Fidelity*.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

## VON STROHEIM

By Thomas Quinn Curtiss

ANGUS AND ROBERTSON, £3.75

### THE COMPLETE GREED of Erich von Stroheim

Compiled and Annotated with a Foreword by Herman G. Weinberg

ARNO PRESS, NEW YORK, \$50.00

Although it is possible to quibble over Thomas Quinn Curtiss' book from a factual and critical viewpoint, its film-by-film coverage of Stroheim's work in America and Europe is readable and affectionate. As he traces Stroheim's tempestuous Hollywood career, especially during the great silent period, it seems incredible that Stroheim had the stamina to keep on trying, knowing that he was going to be knocked down yet again by executives intent only on preserving their investment. In a way, of course, they were right; the tragedy lay in the fact that Stroheim was an artist years ahead of his time ('thirty years,' he used to snap) and totally unable to compromise, especially on matters of length. Curtiss quotes a charming exchange between Stroheim explaining that a character in *The Merry Widow* had a foot fetish and the uncomprehending Thalberg, who bemusedly replied, 'Well, you have a footage fetish.'

For those readers unfamiliar with the films themselves, Curtiss' description of how the productions were set up, Stroheim's meticulous working methods, and the loyalty

which surrounded him from his regular technical crew and the little army of assorted officers who appeared in all the period films, offers useful insights. Several bizarre marginal incidents are also described, including the pathetic cables sent by Stroheim to Eisenstein after the *Walking Down Broadway* débâcle asking for work in Russia, in the event tragically mistimed in view of Eisenstein's own problems in the mid-Thirties.

Whereas Curtiss assesses Stroheim's acting performances with a good deal of critical acumen, his views on the personally directed films tend to mull over familiar ground, and include far too many reconstructed conversations. Little effort is made to describe his actual directorial methods—that extraordinary flair which could work a hundred variations into a simple encounter (*The Wedding March*, *Queen Kelly*), or suggest a world of depravity in a single gesture or in the way in which characters were placed within a set. One would also have liked a fuller analysis of *Walking Down Broadway*, which, though mangled, contains enough material to indicate the new paths he was seeking in the depressed 1930s; the chapter here suggests that the author may not have seen the recently uncovered release version, *Hello, Sister 1*.

Most debatable of all, Curtiss tends to accept all the received opinions about Stroheim's birth and early upbringing as a dashing cavalry officer in an Austria which he re-created so lovingly in American studios years later. Denis Marion (in a Winter 1961-62 *SIGHT AND SOUND* article) largely refuted these claims by producing a photostat of Stroheim's alleged birth certificate, showing that he was the son of a Jewish straw hat manufacturer who entered the Austrian army as a private, deserted for unknown reasons, and emigrated to America around 1906. Curtiss gives the date as 1909, and reinforces his and Stroheim's version of the story by printing a photograph of the young Erich as a cadet at the Mariahilf Academy.

The exact truth may never be known, and in any case does it matter very much? Even if he was not born von Stroheim, he not only maintained his own myth but created one of the most personally felt worlds in the history of the cinema. There was nobody else quite like him.

Curtiss' biography is the third Stroheim book to be published this year. Following hard on the original script of *Greed*, which I reviewed in the last issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND*, we now have what is virtually a companion volume (and at 50 dollars a fabulously expensive one): *The Complete Greed*, compiled by Herman G. Weinberg. As might be expected, Weinberg's foreword is a passionate homage to Stroheim, with all the now familiar background details; but the book's *raison d'être* is its 400 sumptuous stills tracing the outline of the original script. Whereas Joel Finler indicated all the excisions in his

reprint of the written text, Weinberg marks all the cut scenes in his visual retelling of the story, using brief captions consisting of dialogue or script excerpts as well as some linking scene setting.

Given Stroheim's great camera eye, it is not surprising how vividly the film comes to life again even through static images. Marvelous, too, to see for the first time the full range of its location shoot-

ing: rainy streets at night, bucolic picnics and parades, the odd, intriguing exteriors of apartment houses and junk yards, the extraordinary crowd scenes following Trina's discovery of Maria's body—all cruelly cut from the release print. And, for once, the reproduction does full justice to the skills of the original cameramen and stills photographer.

JOHN GILLET

## Letters

### Director as Superstar

SIR,—In your Spring 1972 issue, Joseph McBride in his article 'The Director as Superstar' quotes Orson Welles as having said in 1967 about Federico Fellini that his 'limitation—which is also the source of his charm—is that he is fundamentally very provincial. His films are a small-town boy's dream of the big city. His sophistication works because it is the creation of someone who doesn't have it. But he shows dangerous signs of being a superlative artist with little to say.' (Italics my own emphasis.)

This last sentence strikes me as coming very strangely from Orson Welles.

As a frequent victim of being quoted out of context, misrepresentation and even misquotation, I hesitate to accept quotation marks where no source is given. Assuming, however, the quotation is correct and sufficiently complete, I wish to comment briefly.

Is not this kind of statement about a colleague likely to work in reverse? Could it not equally be applied to many others, perhaps even oneself, perhaps even to the last twenty years of Orson's work?

I strongly, very strongly, recommend to anyone struggling with the problems of content in art, particularly Americans (which both Orson Welles and I are—indeed from different very provincial towns both in the same provincial state, Wisconsin), the terrifyingly simple statement on the subject contained in James Baldwin's latest book, *No Name in the Street* (Michael Joseph: publisher in London; to be published in the USA in the autumn by the Dial Press).

Yours faithfully,  
JOSEPH LOSEY

London.

### Spectator Critics

SIR,—May I draw attention to an inaccuracy in Judy Adamson's otherwise admirable article on Graham Greene as a film critic?

She states that 'he remained the *Spectator's* film critic until 1940'

and later, referring to the period after the *Night and Day* trouble, that 'later in 1938, when he returned to London, he took up his old column in the *Spectator*.'

In point of fact the film critic of the *Spectator* from June 1937 to December 1940 was

Yours very truly,  
BASIL WRIGHT  
Henley-on-Thames, Oxon.

*It was Graham Greene who led me to understand that he was the *Spectator's* film critic from 1935 to 1940. I thank Basil Wright for clarifying this situation. His remarks drove me back to the *Spectator* and I found, in point of fact, that at the time the journal did not list an official film critic on its mast-head. Rather, it simply carried the name of the individual whose review appeared in a particular issue. During the period mentioned by Mr. Wright he wrote 112 reviews, Greene 61, and 12 were written by others.—JUDY ADAMSON*

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## \*\*BLEAK MOMENTS (Contemporary)

Closely observed, harrowing detailed study of depressed suburban lives and the hidden terrors of non-communication. Unhurried, perhaps overlong, but astonishingly well acted; an original and inspiring debut by Mike Leigh, who well deserves the comparison with Olmi. (Anne Raitt, Eric Allan, Joolia Cappleman.) *Reviewed.*

## \*\*BOUCHER, LE (Commoisseur)

Chabrol's splendid study of a murder case in a French provincial landscape, and the relationship between the lonely butcher and the schoolmistress. Hitchcockian, of course; but by now it's more than enough to say Chabrol. (Jean Yanne, Stéphane Audran.)

## BURGLARS, THE (Columbia-Warner)

Adaptation of a David Goodis novel previously filmed by Wendkos—not that you would notice from this routinely glossy robbery thriller set against exotic Greek locations. Hideously dubbed into English. (Jean-Paul Belmondo, Dyan Cannon, Omar Sharif; director, Henri Verneuil.)

## \*CABARET (Cinerama)

A disappointing version of the stage musical, showing how good it could have been in the cabaret numbers presided over by Joel Grey. Otherwise, it's an overstated film, with too much portentous non-musical plotting, and Liza Minnelli stridently effective but way out of period as Isherwood's Sally Bowles. (Michael York, Helmut Griem; director, Bob Fosse.) *Reviewed.*

## \*\*CEREMONY, THE (Academy/Connoisseur)

The fluctuating fortunes of a once powerful dynasty and the economic 'miracle' of Japan's post-war expansion charted through a succession of hieratic rituals. Blackly humorous and grotesquely tragic, Oshima's static masterpiece dynamically expresses the conflict between traditional forms and actual feelings. (Kenzo Kawarazaki, Atsuo Nakamura, Kei Sato.) *Reviewed.*

## CHATO'S LAND (United Artists)

Noble savage stuff, with Charles Bronson as a half-breed Apache stripping to his loin cloth to decimate the racist posse which won't let him live in peace with his squaw. (Jack Palance, Simon Oakland, Richard Basehart; director, Michael Winner.)

## CONNECTING ROOMS (Hemdale)

Bette Davis in Bayswater bedsitter territory, and her most sympathetic

performance in years as a musician who befriends Michael Redgrave, the down-at-heel schoolteacher in the next room. Otherwise an old-fashioned piece of schmaltz, camped up, laced with pop, and laid on rather thick. (Director, Franklin Gollings.)

## \*COOL BREEZE (MGM-EMI)

Remake of *The Asphalt Jungle* with a Los Angeles setting and (apart from white cops paired off with black ones to preserve racial equality) an all-black cast. Competent and quite engaging, but a pale shadow beside the true noir of Huston's version. (Thalmus Rasulala, Raymond St. Jacques; director, Barry Pollack.)

## \*DAY IN THE DEATH OF JOE EGG, A (Columbia-Warner)

The big screen adaptation of Peter Nichols' blackly humorous play reveals its theatrical origins while bringing the spastic child from the back of the stage uncomfortably into close-up. But the performances, especially Janet Suzman as the harassed mother, are well worth watching. (Alan Bates; director, Peter Medak.)

## DULCIMA (MGM-EMI)

John Mills as a miserly old farmer obsessed with the young girl (Carol White) who moves in as his housekeeper. The script swerves uncertainly between women's mag sentimentalism and brooding tragedy, and the prettiness of the locations does much to dissipate both moods. (Director, Frank Nesbitt.)

## FOLLOW ME (Rank)

Expanded version of Peter Shaffer's play *The Private Eye*, with Topol as the eccentric detective hired to observe the equally eccentric peregrinations of an unhappily married Mia Farrow. Carol Reed somewhat impersonally directs an uneasy mixture of broad comedy and high romance. (Michael Jayston.)

## \*FORBIN PROJECT, THE (Rank)

Above-average science fiction, with a computer gradually taking control of both the man who made it and the nuclear stalemate. Weakens towards the end with some concessions to well-worn clichés, but there are some unnerving effects along the way. (Eric Braeden; director, Joseph Sargent.)

## \*\*FRENZY (Rank)

Hitchcock back on home ground, and responding as ever to the suggestive qualities of the London scene. A connoisseur's piece, with echoes right back to *The Lodger*, in the Jack the Ripperish activities of his Covent Garden fruiterer, and some succulent set-pieces. (Jon Finch, Barry Foster, Alec McCowen.) *Reviewed.*

## \*\*GARDEN OF THE FINZI-CONTINIS, THE (Walter Reade Organisation)

Astonishing return to form by De Sica. Or rather rebirth, since this haunting evocation of a dying world (wealthy, aristocratic Jewry in the Fascist Italy of 1938), seen through a dazzlingly beautiful and ambivalent veil of nostalgia, looks more Bertolucci than De Sica. (Dominique Sanda, Lino Capolicchio, Helmut Berger.)

## \*HAROLD AND MAUDE (Paramount)

Love affair between the teenage scion of a wealthy house and an eighty-year-old Bohemian, splendid in its moments of black humour and mawkish whenever it takes its characters' sentimental stirrings seriously. Ruth Gordon, sadly, pulls out all the tear-jerking stops as the little old lady life force, but Bud Cort fares better as her suicidal suitor. (Director, Hal Ashby.)

## \*\*HOW TO STEAL A DIAMOND IN FOUR UNEASY LESSONS (Fox)

Stately but stylish set of variations on the theme of the robbery that goes wrong. A very engaging script (William Goldman) very engagingly played but not quite overcoming the problems of *déjà vu*. (Robert Redford, George Segal, Zero Mostel; director, Peter Yates.) *Reviewed.*

## I WANT WHAT I WANT (Cinerama)

Incredibly coy saga of a sex change, in which Anne Heywood copes valiantly with the role of Roy-Wendy and such outbursts as 'Oh, but I like knickers'. (Michael Coles, Harry Andrews; director, John Dexter.)

## JERUSALEM FILE, THE (MGM-EMI)

Confused political thriller involving Arab and Israeli students reaching for their own kind of settlement of the deadlock after the Six Day War. Highly ambiguous, moralising script irritatingly embellished by slick direction. (Bruce Davison, Donald Pleasence, Nicol Williamson; director, John Flynn.)

## JO (MGM-EMI)

Dismal French adaptation of *The Gazebo*, a farce about a perambulating corpse that makes one sigh for *The Trouble with Harry*. Subtitled, but the mugging of Louis de Funès would probably be funereal in any language. (Bernard Blier, Claude Gensac; director, Jean Girault.)

## KIDNAPPED (Rank)

Adaptation of Stevenson's novel, with some of *Catriona* thrown in for good measure. The swashbuckling, historic colour and variegated adventures are effective enough for any half-term treat, though Michael Caine's Alan Breck is rather more of a romantic hero than Stevenson intended. (Trevor Howard, Jack Hawkins, Donald Pleasence; director, Delbert Mann.)

## \*KING ELEPHANT (Fox)

Superbly photographed and fascinating documentary about East African wildlife, sadly marred by its coyly anthropomorphic commentary. (Director, Simon Trevor.)

## \*\*KING LEAR (Contemporary)

Kozintsev's imposing *Lear*, a less immediately vital and original film than his *Hamlet*, but still a major contribution to screen Shakespeare. As with *Hamlet*, the film grows out of a deeply thought conception of the play—in this instance, most strikingly, the relation of *Lear*'s tragedy to the condition of his subjects. (Yuri Jarvet.) *Reviewed.*

## \*MADAME SIN (Scotia-Barber)

Bette Davis and Denholm Elliott in commanding form as the arch super-criminal and her syco-phantically evil aide. Otherwise limping a trifle lamely after James Bond. (Robert Wagner, Dudley Sutton; director, David Greene.)

## MADE FOR EACH OTHER (Fox)

Problem-studded romance between two lonely misfits from a New York encounter group, expressed in Freudian jargon and acted out in every sense by its actor scriptwriters. (Renee Taylor, Joseph Bologna; director, Robert B. Bean.)

## \*MINNIE AND MOSKOWITZ (Rank)

Cassavetes observes the tentative romance between two lonely drifters with a painful and painstaking accuracy, effectively applying his improvisational techniques to a formally structured narrative. (Gena Rowlands, Seymour Cassel.)

## MY OLD MAN'S PLACE (Cinerama)

Confused and violent allegory, weighed down by its several conflicting messages. A trio of Vietnam veterans bloody up the peaceful countryside, and the idea that war makes beasts of us all peeps tentatively through some melodramatic relationships. (Arthur Kennedy, Mitchell Ryan, Michael Moriarty; director, Edwin Sherrin.)

## \*POCKET MONEY (N.G.C.)

Idiosyncratically meandering anti-Western, with Paul Newman and Lee Marvin engagingly playing a pair of incompetent cowboys who are stronger on wordplay than gunplay. (Director, Stuart Rosenberg.)

## QUIET DAYS IN CLICHY (Miracle)

Nasty and tediously pornographic dramatisation of Henry Miller's womanising days in Paris, faithful—in its unfeeling and below-the-belt fashion—to its 'literary' source. (Paul Valjean, Wayne John Rodda; director, Jens Jørgen Thorsen.)

## RED SUN (Columbia-Warner)

Japanese samurai and American outlaw join forces to fight Comanches, roam the West, and settle accounts with the black-hearted French gambler who has doublecrossed them. A nice exotic idea ruined by suburban direction, though Charles Bronson and Toshiro Mifune are good value. (Alain Delon, Ursula Andress; director, Terence Young.)

## \*RULING CLASS, THE (United Artists)

Overlong version of Peter Barnes' play satirising upper-class values. In theme, staging and performances, extravagance is the watchword. Confidently organised by Peter Medak and often perversely enjoyable, but perilous overstatement takes over long before the end. (Peter O'Toole, Alastair Sim, Arthur Lowe.)

## SHOES OF THE FISHERMAN, THE (MGM-EMI)

Four-year-old religious epic in a modern setting, involving the trials and tribulations of a Russian who finds himself on the hot seat in the Vatican. Anthony Quinn seems an odd choice for Pope, albeit representative of the overall conflict between the film's message and its methods. (Oskar Werner, Laurence Olivier; director, Michael Anderson.)

## SITTING TARGET (MGM-EMI)

Sluggish, thuggish thriller, remarkable only for the number of violent deaths it manages to cram in, and the amount of footage it expends on Oliver Reed brooding explosively as he plots revenge on his faithless wife. (Ian McShane, Jill St. John; director, Douglas Hickox.)

## VAMPIRE CIRCUS (Rank)

Masquerading as a travelling circus, the vampire Count's followers change into animals at will and display a taste for men and children as well as the customary naked ladies. In all other respects (shaky performances, a script which piles on laughable excess) a routine horror from the Hammer assembly line. (Adrienne Corri, Laurence Payne; director, Robert Young.)

## ZERO POPULATION GROWTH (Scotia-Barber)

More glum prognostications of the 21st century, with Oliver Reed and Geraldine Chaplin foolishly defying a worldwide ban on birth. Lacking a visionary in any department to lend plausibility to the sundry predictions and unsympathetic characters, the potential is left mostly unexplored. (Diane Cilento, Don Gordon; director, Michael Campus.)

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